

Humility, a Ministerial Qualification.

AN
ADDRESS
TO THE STUDENTS
OF
THE GENERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
OF THE
PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN THE UNITED STATES.

DELIVERED AT THE
SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT.

In St. Peter's Church, New-York, June 28, 1840.

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NEW-YORK:
PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY
SWORDS, STANFORD, & CO.

1840.

“O God, give me a true and prudent humility, that I may attend the flock of Christ as a servant; look on him as my pattern; study his conduct and spirit; spend and be spent for my flock; through the same Jesus Christ, thy Son.”

ADDRESS.

It is a circumstance not a little humiliating, that the most vital qualifications for the ministry of Christ are often the last to command our attention. With a view to the present occasion, I cast my eye over the most popular treatises relating to the ministerial office, and was much surprised to observe an almost entire silence on the subject of *humility*, as an indispensable ministerial qualification. Graces nearly akin to this are, it is true, insisted on, with various degrees of earnestness; but *this*, to my mind the very source of all other graces—the main-spring, under GOD, of all Gospel success in the ministry, as it is the main element of all spiritual life in the church, seems to have fallen into comparative neglect: or to have received far less notice than its character, as a great fundamental in religion, actually demands. I shall therefore, need no indulgence, my young brethren, for making it the subject of my address to you this morning.

The grand principle of all godliness lies in the submission of the soul to God—the entire surrender of the will of self to the will of God. Yea more, it is an actual dying unto self, and an actual living unto God—the annihilation in us of “the old man which is corrupt,” and which constitutes our moral nature as we come into the world; and the substitution of “the new man,” which, in our state of regeneration, “is created in us after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness.”¹ Hence the followers of our Lord are said to possess the temper of little children,² to have “the mind of Christ”³—to be transformed into “the divine likeness”⁴—to be “partakers of the divine nature”⁵—and the life they live, to be “by faith on the Son of GOD”—to be “not unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again.”⁶ This humbling of self—

¹ See Rom. 6, first 14 verses. Gal. 2:20; 3:26, 27. 2 Cor. 5:17, 18. Eph. 4:23, 24.

² Matt. 18: 3.

³ 1 Cor. 2: 16. Phil. 2: 5.

⁴ 1 John 3:2. 2 Cor. 3:18.

⁵ 1 Pet. 1: 4.

⁶ 2 Cor. 5: 15.

this surrender of the whole man to the nature and authority of God, must enter essentially into the obedience of every Christian. But in reference to the holy ministry, there is a special demand for this grace. In the very position of one in this sacred office, there is something which calls for more than a common exercise of “lowliness of mind.” He holds the place at once of a subordinate and a superior—a follower and a leader—a scholar and a teacher—one who is to receive instructions in a spirit of implicit submission, and to deliver them in the spirit of a divine commission. The difficulties here, to one having within him the deceitful heart of man, will be instantly apparent to us; and the necessary remedy, *humility of soul*, not less apparent.

But this subject deserves a more minute and thorough examination. Let us, then, view the grace of humility in its connection with a due preparation of heart and mind for the sacred ministry; and in its bearing upon the proper exercise of the ministerial functions.

I. First, humility as necessary to a due *preparation of heart* for this office. He who enters upon it, is to be “an ambassador for CHRIST,” to go forth in “*Christ’s stead*”⁷ to promote the reconciliation of sinners with God. Self, and selfish ends, therefore, are to be wholly merged, and the will and glory of another are to absorb every thought, and employ every energy. There is to be a total subordination of the man to the exalted work of the minister; an entire sacrifice of all self-importance upon the altar of Christ—a casting down of all lofty imaginations before that cross in whose elevation alone we are to glory. Yes, in *Christ’s stead* the minister of Christ is to appear. The divine, the lofty motives, therefore, which moved the eternal Son of GOD to set up, through the merits of his own blood, his kingdom among men, are the only motives which should operate upon the heart in making it desire the office of a minister. The spirit of deep self-renunciation which propelled him, through all his marvellous condescension, from the glory of the Father to the shame and agony of the cross, should in some essential degree propel us to enter upon the ministry of reconciliation. But while the sacred office, thus, from its very nature, makes a special call for humility in preparing the heart for its high duties, at the same time it presents no slight temptation to an opposite spirit. A large proportion of those who become ministers are, by this means, raised from a condition of comparative obscurity, to one of necessary notoriety and importance; while every ambassador of Christ, whatever may have been his previous rank among men, is by this office elevated, in dignity, far above the real merit of any child of Adam; and

⁷ 2 Cor. 5: 20.

invested with a divine authority, which maybe prostituted to purposes of mere human or selfish ambition. The dignity, therefore, of the ministerial office, instead of filling us, as it ought, with sacred awe, and making us tremble in view of our utter unworthiness for so holy a trust, maybe sought by us as the ground of personal distinction, or the instrument of self-exaltation.⁸ This is an awful consideration. Alas! what can be more awful than the guilt of seizing upon the instruments consecrated by GOD to his own glory, and making them the instruments of our ungodly pride, the guilt of daring to take from the altar of the Holy One the censers set apart to his praise, to burn incense unto ourselves. Yet this guilt, in all its horrible weight, may lie upon the souls of those who bear the vessels of the Lord; and nothing can shield them but the grace of humility; the possession of that mind of Christ, which prompted him to leave his equality with GOD, and take upon him the form of a servant;⁹ that mind of Christ, which drew from an apostle the exclamation, “who is sufficient for these things!”¹⁰ and from the holiest of the Fathers, an entreaty with their friends to have pity on them, and not to force them into an office so perilous to their souls.¹¹ O, my young friends, could you have but a glimpse of the amazing solemnity of that office to which you aspire; I do not say your aspirations would be quenched, but I do say, that you would cast yourselves, in the deepest prostration of soul, before the cross of your Saviour, and beg, with strong crying and tears, for pardon and grace through his blood—*pardon*, that you have hitherto so lightly esteemed this holy office; and *grace*, that you may bring to it the self-renouncing spirit of your Master and your God.

II. Christian humility, in its largest measure, is essential, however, not only to a due preparation of *heart* for the ministry, but also for a suitable preparation of *mind*. All must have proper *knowledge* as well as proper *motives*. “Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, hear the word at MY mouth, and warn them from ME.”¹² “Go ye, disciple all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”¹³ “If any man speak, let him speak as

⁸ “They whom God, by a terrible judgment, leaves to enter the ministry solely of themselves, are generally puffed up with a carnal notion of its dignity; while they that through God’s mercy are called to it, at the same time that they know its dignity, are humbled under a sense of its weight, and the account they must one day give.” Bishop Wilson.

⁹ Phil. 2: 5, 6, 7, 8.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 2: 16.

¹¹ See the cases of St. Chrysostom and St. Ambrose.

¹² Ezekiel, 33:7.

¹³ Matt. 28: 19, 20.

the *oracles of God*, that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”¹⁴ A knowledge of GOD’S WILL, therefore, is to be the engrossing-object of ministerial attainment; as this is to constitute the sum total of the minister’s message. He is absolutely, and under all circumstances, restricted to “the truth as it is in JESUS.”¹⁵ Hence he is to be prepared to speak neither less nor more than what GOD hath given him to speak. His lesson will be a most difficult one—involving a degree of self-renunciation and lowliness of mind, inconceivably trying to the natural pride of his intellect, encouraged and strengthened as that pride is likely to be by the very character of his occupation, as well as by the consideration that he is soon to be advanced to the post of master in Israel. Here, then, is one who is to act simply in the character of ambassador—who is to receive a message from the GOD of Heaven, and bear it in all its integrity, without addition or alteration, to perishing sinners like himself; but one who is naturally self-sufficient, proud of his own faculties, confident of his wisdom and strength; who is occupied in a way calculated, without some check from above, to awaken his self-dependence; and is looking forward to the distinction of instructor and guide to his fellow men. What but the deepest humility, the lowest place at the cross, can secure him from the snare of the devil; or what is not less to be deprecated, the deceitfulness of an evil heart!

It is quite possible, my dear young friends, for a person to deceive himself, in regard to his real dependence for a knowledge of religion, he may profess great zeal for Holy Writ—talk loudly and warmly of the “BIBLE as *the religion* of Protestants;” while, in fact, his heart is totally destitute of the spirit of meek submission to GOD’S will, only anxious lest suspicion be brought upon the wisdom and safety of its own imaginings. The countless advocates of the countless clashing systems of faith around you are all equally clamorous for the Bible as *its own interpreter*. But *how*, in the view of a large proportion of these persons, is the BIBLE to interpret *for itself*? Truly, by speaking through *their* lips. The apostolic fathers must be silent—the church Catholic must be silent, and *they* alone must be listened to, or the BIBLE will not interpret rightly. It can hardly require a child’s sagacity to discover, that their great love of a *self-interpreting* Scripture is little else than a vain conceit of themselves, and a vain desire to witness the triumph of their own opinions; especially as their solicitude for the right of private judgment seems not to extend beyond themselves; all others—even their followers—being called upon to

¹⁴ Pet. 4:11.

¹⁵ “A preacher ought to advance nothing but what he has received from JESUS CHRIST. *My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*” 1 John, 7:16. Bishop Wilson.

subscribe implicitly to the wisdom of their dictation. It is quite clear, therefore, beloved, that the loudest professions of regard for the Bible, may consist with a heart full of pride and of supreme anxiety for self-promotion: while it is equally clear that deep humility, a temper of mind which leads men to distrust their own understandings; to esteem “others better than themselves;” “to prove all things and hold fast that which is good,”—alone, under GOD’S grace, can ensure to them “a true knowledge and understanding of His word.”¹⁶

For here the consideration is not to be omitted, that in the study of Holy Writ an attainment is to be sought far beyond that mere critical knowledge which secures accuracy in theological opinion;—viz, the *subduing and sanctifying power of truth*. The spirit of man must be humbled and chastened before the inspirations of the Spirit of the Great GOD; must be bowed in deep reverence under a sense of the awful presence of Jehovah in his own life-giving word; must, like the child Samuel in the temple, be ever ready, while listening to this mysterious Voice of the Highest, to say, “Speak, LORD, for thy servant heareth.”¹⁷ The scholar may come with the strength of genius, and the stores of philosophy, and the skill of a practised critic, to the study of GOD’S word; but if he come not with the fear of GOD before his eyes, and the Spirit of GOD in his heart, and a sense of his own spiritual wretchedness there; his reward will be that, and only that, of “the natural man, who cannot know the things of the Spirit, because they are spiritually discerned.”¹⁸ He that *would* know them,—*would* be allowed to discern the deep things of GOD, wrapt in the secret folds of his own revelation,—allowed to enter the inner temple of truth, and proceed to the holy of holies, must come bending under an awful apprehension of the majesty of a present and indwelling GOD, and “a deep sense of his own unworthiness,”—must put his shoes from off his feet, from a feeling that the ground on which he stands is holy. “The temple of Christian knowledge,” saith Augustine, “is indeed *large and lofty*; but the door is very *low*, so that the high and arrogant man is excluded, while he alone who stoops and humbles himself can enter in.”¹⁹ Humble yourselves, then, beloved, before the Word of GOD: reverence the incomprehensible Power that dwells therein; listen to the Voice which whispers life and peace from the depths of the divine counsels; and you shall know, of a truth, that “the *secret* of the Lord is

¹⁶ “To understand the holy Scriptures aright, is to understand them as the primitive church did.” Bishop Wilson.

¹⁷ 1 Samuel, 3:9.

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 2:14.

¹⁹ Quoted from the Homily on the Scriptures.

with them that fear him, and put their trust in his mercy.”²⁰ You shall be permitted to feast your souls upon “the hidden Manna,”²¹—to eat of “the living bread which came down from heaven,”²² and drink of the water of that deep and unfailing “well, which springeth up unto everlasting life.”²³ And hence you will be prepared, in some humble degree, to dispense the same to the perishing world for whom CHRIST died.

III. We are called to consider, finally, the bearing of humility upon the due exercise of the ministerial functions.

“CHRIST is head over all things to his church;” the source of all wisdom, authority, and strength to his people. They who act in his name and stead, therefore, must act by the light of his wisdom, be subject to his authority, and sustained by his power. They must act by the light of his wisdom. So far as this point may relate to their message, it has been sufficiently discussed already. It has respect, however, to the *manner* of delivering this message: and here the condescension, the gentleness, and humility of JESUS, claim our anxious imitation. But here I shall not enlarge, as the same train of thought will be taken up in the sequel of my remarks. The ministers of Christ must also be subject to CHRIST’S *authority*. In their character, as ministers they can have no authority without him. ALL power was committed to him as HEAD of the church; and hence must proceed from him, or not be possessed. It was his good pleasure, however, to restrict the transmission of this power, through the ages, to the end of time, to a visible and well-defined succession, kept up by the laying on of the hands of a certain continuous order of men, beginning with the apostles.²⁴ We can have no part nor lot in this power, therefore, except we submit to the appointment of CHRIST, and obtain it from some one belonging to this succession. But such submission will require the exercise of a self-humbling spirit—an inflexible adherence to the principle, that where GOD has *appointed*, it is only left for man to *obey*. The motive, however, is here strong: for, if there be one assumption of power more arrogant and truly appalling than another, it is that which, in defiance of the authority of Christ, presumes, self-constituted, to act as his ambassador. But there is yet another kind of authority committed by

²⁰ Psalm 25:14.

²¹ Rev. 2:17.

²² John, 6:32, 33.

²³ John, 4:14.

²⁴ In proof, see ONDERDONK, *On Episcopacy tested by Scripture*; and PERCEVAL, *On Apostolical Succession*; two works which should be in the hands of every person who desires to know the Gospel of Christ in its divine and necessary consubstantiation with the Church of Christ. Both may be had at the Depository of the New-York Protestant Episcopal Tract Society.

Christ to his church, to which our submission is demanded; I mean that which relates, properly speaking, to church government. A man may be duly commissioned by Christ, and still, from want of “humbleness of mind,” be guilty of criminal resistance to Christ’s authority. “HE hath set divers orders of ministers in his church;”²⁵ and hath commanded obedience to those who may have the rule over us;²⁶ while the church, in pursuance of this command, has exacted of us a vow, “to follow, with a glad mind and will, their godly admonitions, and to submit to their godly judgments.”²⁷ The natural pride of the human heart, however, greatly endangers this principle of subordination, while the evil is aggravated in this country by the tendency of our political institutions; and nothing can effectually resist it but the grace of humility. This grace, however, constantly and deeply cherished, will be found a sufficient antidote. If allowed to bear sway in our hearts, it will help to settle many a perplexing case of conscience on questions of duty to our superiors; as its decisions will be always in favour of the principle of due subordination to the church, even to individual disadvantage. Pride is specially skilful, when called upon to yield to the counsels of another, in raising and entrenching itself behind what it terms *conscientious scruples*. Humility, on the other hand, restrains such scruples, and loosing sight of self,—except as self may be interested in the general good,—seeks only the free and full operation of those grand principles upon which Christ has established the order and discipline of his church. It submits, for *Christ’s sake*, to the laws which he has left to be dispensed by his ministers for the perfect fellowship of his people. In short, it looks not to self, but to “the communion of saints,”²⁸—the unity and peace of ‘CHRIST’S holy catholic church.’²⁹ Again, the ministers of Christ must be sustained in their work by the power of Christ. Here the human must be swallowed up in the divine. Here, without the Master in heaven, the servant on earth can do

²⁵ 1 Cor. 12:28, and Prayer in Institution Office.

²⁶ Heb. 13:17.

²⁷ Vows of Deacons and Priests at Ordination.

²⁸ Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

²⁹ “The holy Basil visited one day a sacred brotherhood; and after such discourse as was fitting, said to the head of it, ‘Hast thou a brother here who has the grace of *obedience*?’ And he answered him, ‘My lord, we be all thy servants, and are endeavouring after salvation.’ Basil said a second time, ‘Yea, hast thou one *so* gifted?’ And he brought unto him a brother. Then the holy Basil employed him to minister to him as he dined. After he had eaten, the other brought him water to wash; but Basil said, ‘Come hither, and I too will give thee water to wash.’ And the other suffered the Bishop to pour out water upon his hands. Then said Basil, ‘When I enter into the chancel, come before me, and I will make thee a *deacon*.’ And afterwards he made him *priest*, and took him with him to his own house, on account of his *obedience*.” History of the great St. Basil.

nothing. “Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but GOD that giveth the increase.”³⁰ And to show us our dependence upon him, and that he would have us humbly and unceasingly recognise this dependence; yea, to let all the world see that “the success of the Gospel stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God,”³¹—that neither genius, nor learning, nor eloquence, nor labour, can avail aught in this contest with “the world, the flesh, and the devil,” unaccompanied by his “Presence and Spirit,”—he has usually granted the most abundant results to the humblest and most unpretending efforts; thus emphatically taking “the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty.”³²

My dear young brethren,—I address myself to the graduating class,—you are about to be admitted to an awful trust; to be sent forth to a tremendous labour. But you have no reason for discouragement. Only feel that you are mere instruments in the hand of GOD; repress within you all thoughts of self; and with the conviction that you act only for Christ, and only by his power, proceed humbly but boldly to your work. You will find him ever with you—ever on your right hand, that you shall not be moved. The instruments intrusted to you shall prove mighty, through GOD. The divine Leader, in whose strength you confide, shall conduct you to certain victory. But then you must see to it that your proud hearts do not here lead you astray—do not betray you into the belief that you are depending upon CHRIST, and giving him glory, when, in fact, you rely upon your own miserable strength, walking wholly “by sight.” You may be induced, perhaps, as others have sometimes been, to suppose that you humbly submit to Christ in your ministry, while your submission is ruinously partial; governed solely by your own imaginations. You may have a professed reliance upon the Holy Spirit which, by his precious blood-shedding, Christ purchased for his church, while you virtually shut from you that Spirit, by a presumptuous disregard of the only authorized means through which it is to be sought and cherished; or by exhibiting those means in a light essentially differing from that in which our Lord has revealed them. Humility, deep and abiding humility, such as fixes in the heart the temper, the docility of childhood,—as awakens there the inquiry,

³⁰ 1 Cor. 3:7.

³¹ 1 Cor. 2: 5.

³² 1 Cor. 1: 27. “It is God who gives his ministers, *such as are humble*, power over the hearts and souls of men; when, distrusting themselves, they ascribe all the glory to God.” “There have been many, who without any very great learning and eloquence, yet by their communication in a humble and low way, have instructed and converted more than famous preachers; for they preached not themselves, but Christ Jesus; placing all their confidence in God.” Bishop Wilson.

“Lord, what wilt *thou* have me to do?”³³—alone can keep us at the feet of our divine Teacher and Head—can save us from the guilt and the curse of adding to or taking from the amount or the significance of the instruments which he has made needful to our success—can dispose us to bow in all submission and thankfulness to the wonder-working power of “God, once manifest in the flesh,” but now mysteriously present, to bless, support, and comfort us, in the word, the sacraments, and ordinances of his church!³⁴

Not less will such humility be needed in our choice of a field of labour. It is usually pride which makes us look for large fields, talk of extended spheres of usefulness—which prompts us to remove from place to place, under the plea of being able to do more for the church, of occupying a situation more commensurate with our powers and qualifications.³⁵ In this way, depend upon it, ten words are spoken for *self*, where one is spoken for *Christ*. The truly humble mind thinks comparatively little of personal powers and qualifications in a work achieved only by the wisdom and power of the Mighty GOD. It asks only, “are these sinners for whom CHRIST died? and is a door open to me to become the instrument of their salvation?” The only result to which it looks is the glory of the cross, in the rescue of men from guilt, corruption, and endless misery; and it sees no cause for declining or remitting labour where there are sinners yet to be brought to Christ.³⁶

³³ Acts, 9: 6.

³⁴ “What we want [clergy and laity] is a little more—*superstition*, as the world would call it; but as it is in truth, when exercised upon what is revealed in the Bible, and taught in the church, *genuine faith*—a child-like submission to God’s ordinances, even should we not discern their utility; though in truth their utility is sufficiently evident, in bringing our minds to dwell on holy things.” The Rev. William Gresley.

³⁵ “*Self-love* is too often at the bottom of removals, and not the glory of God and the good of souls, when men’s labours are attended with tolerable success; yet, because either they can better their temporal condition, or think that a more public station would be more suitable to their great capacities, they leave their station for one more full of dangers, without any prospect of being more serviceable to God, or to his church and the souls of men; not considering that this is the voice of pride, self-love, and covetousness, and an evil example to others, to whom we do, or should, preach *humility* as the very foundation of Christianity. This was unknown to the first ages of the church.” Bishop Wilson.

³⁶ “The value of a single soul in the sight of the great Teacher, is a lesson worthy of the remembrance of his ministers. Are they tempted to be discouraged by the smallness of their charge? They have the comfort of their Master’s example, as well as their Master’s promise. ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.’ If Satan taunts them, like the brother of David, with the suggestion that their flock is but as ‘a few sheep in the wilderness,’ let them reflect that it is still that ‘beautiful flock’ for which Christ shed his blood; and he will one day ask of their pastor respecting each of them, inconsiderable as their number may have been, ‘With whom hast thou left them?’ We are not our own in respect of *place*, any more than as regards disposal of time,

This grace of humility is indispensable, too, in securing a proper pastoral intercourse with Christ's flock: first, in directing it chiefly to "poor and needy people." Our Lord opened his message by declaring, in the words of that heavenly prophecy, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the *poor*." And in the prosecution of his mission he literally fulfilled this prophecy—he came to the POOR. The rich and honourable, it is true, were not wholly passed by; still the poor, and helpless, and wretched, shared most largely in his attentions; while children, the lambs of the flock, were in this respect pre-eminently favoured. It is well that the Saviour has given such prominence to this part of the pastoral duty; as it is a part little calculated, from its humble character, to gain much consequence with men, or much regard, where humility is wanting, from the ministers of his word. If we would not neglect, therefore, this least attractive, but most urgent class of duties, or if we would fulfil them with satisfaction to ourselves and profitableness to the church, it becomes us to seek the temper of our Master, as well as observe his commands; remembering that "whosoever would be the chiefest, shall be servant of *all*."³⁷ And then, as to the proper *manner* of our intercourse with the people, this temper of lowliness will furnish the only security. The dignity of our office, as teachers and rulers in the church, is liable, without this temper in constant exercise, to beget in us a spirit of imperiousness and unfriendly reserve, which cannot but greatly abridge our influence in bringing sinners into obedience to Christ. When our Lord would inculcate upon his hearers *humility* as the foundation of practical godliness, he said unto them, "learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart."³⁸ If we would be successful in the inculcation of this great principle, we must be enabled to do the same,—to show the people by our condescension, our meekness and gentleness of manner, that we are not

or choice of duty. The placing of ministers is one of the chief prerogatives of our Lord and Head. Is, then, the pastor tempted, in his retired and thinly-peopled parish, to spare his labour, and put forth less of his strength than he might be willing to expend in a sphere of greater excitement and more obvious to the inspection of men? let him ask himself, whether the oversight of a single soul be not more than he will desire to answer for at the day of account?" Bishop C. R. Sumner.

"In a small country parish, in which he is concealed from the observation of the world, the minister must especially beware of idleness and lukewarmness; of a slovenly preparation for the pulpit; and a total neglect, or a hasty and superficial discharge of the other pastoral duties, as if the flock were less precious in God's sight because of its smallness; or, perhaps, of its confined range in mental cultivation." Coleridge's Advice, &c.

³⁷ Matt. 20: 26, 27. Let me here recommend to every young clergyman the perusal of the life of Dr. HENRY HAMMOND, by the Dean of Christ Church, Dr. FELL.

³⁸ Matt. 11:29.

calling upon them for a submission to Christ which we have not rendered ourselves. The same spirit will be needed, too, as a guide in our social amusements or recreations among the people: and here I refer to such only as are in themselves *innocent*. It is a common reply, especially of young clergymen, to expostulations on this point; “I need some relaxation, and if I resort to that only which is lawful, I do not see why I should be a slave to public opinion. In matters of amusement I must be allowed to *judge for myself*.” As a sound and practical answer to all such inconsiderate pleas let me direct your attention to the words of COLERIDGE, in *his advice to the young parish priest*—a manual which should be in the hand of every clergyman; “Any amusement which may give offence to parishioners must be relinquished; and those which are perfectly unexceptionable in their character, must be always considered and enjoyed as occasional recreations, in order to recruit and sharpen his powers for his principal employment, not as themselves necessary, and therefore not such as ought to engross any considerable portion of his time. In a word, let him never forget in this matter the sovereign rule of St. Paul, that even Christian liberty must be exercised with a constant regard to Christian charity; that he must not do that which is lawful in itself, if the doing of it *by him* will cause offence in his weaker brethren; and that he who neglects the dictates of Christian prudence, neglects that which the doctrines and the example of the apostles equally inculcate upon the unselfish and believing follower of Christ.” But *humility* alone can rightly dispose us to listen to such advice; and to act in all such cases as those “who are bought with a price,” and bound, at all times and under all circumstances, not only to “glorify God,” but also “to follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”³⁹

Also, in the selection and treatment of the topics of our sermons to the people, a large share of humility is required. Pride—a desire to display our own powers and learning—will lead us to the choice rather of curious and striking topics, than of instructive and useful ones; and will induce us to discuss them in a way more likely to attract attention to the force of our minds and the extent of our research, than to gain sinners to Christ. Hence the mind that needs instruction in the first “principles of the doctrine of CHRIST,” is often sent away from the sanctuary crowded and perplexed with classic imagery and scholastic dogmas;⁴⁰ and the faith which calls for

³⁹ Romans, 14:19.

⁴⁰ “Preachers should be *humble*. It is too often that they perplex those whom they should instruct, either by proving things which want no proof, or by proposing useless questions and doubts; or speaking of things above the capacities of the common people. There is a great deal of difference betwixt people admiring a preacher, and being edified by his

encouragement and strength, is dismissed under an oppressive load of oft exploded infidel objections, brought forward to a Christian people by a Christian minister, to afford him an occasion to display his adroitness in demolishing them; but which—owing to the troublesome tendency of the human mind to receive doubt rather than to get rid of it,—he unfortunately fails to accomplish. Humility, on the other hand, looking only to the glory of the cross,—”preaching not self, but CHRIST JESUS the LORD,”—selects such topics as tend to lead the sinner directly to the faith, and obedience, and holiness of the Gospel; and presents them in a manner best calculated to subserve this simple, but vital object. In the absence of this grace, it is true, an *effect* may be produced, and an effect gratifying to the vanity of the preacher. His thoughts by their brilliancy, his words by their artificial lustre, may gather crowds, and hold them in breathless wonder; while they fall cold and dead upon the heart of the condemned sinner—never exciting the inquiry, “What shall I do to be saved?”⁴¹

The grace we are considering will, in its fullest measure, be needful to a prudent and efficient exercise of church discipline. Nothing so

sermons.”

“The primitive fathers were ever modest upon religious questions. They contented themselves with resolving such questions as were proposed to them, without starting new ones, and carefully suppressed the curious, restless temper. Bishop Wilson. “I abhor the folly of those unlearned persons who revile and despise learning because they know not what it is; and yet my soul approveth of the resolution of holy Paul, who determined to know nothing among his hearers (that is, comparatively to value and make ostentation of no other wisdom) but (the knowledge of) a Christ crucified; to know God in Christ is eternal life. The knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ—of heaven and holiness, doth build up the soul to endless blessedness, and affordeth it solid peace and comfort; when a multitude of school niceties serve but for vain janglings, and hurtful diversions and contentions. It is the fundamental doctrines of the catechism, which I highest value, and daily think of, and find most useful to myself and others. The Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, do find me now the most plentiful matter for all my meditations. They are to me as my daily bread and drink; and as I can speak and write of them over and over again, so I had rather hear or read of them than of any of the school niceties which once so much pleased me.” Richard Baxter.

⁴¹ “I would rather send away a hearer smiting his breast, than please the most learned audience with a fine sermon against vice. Avoid such discourses and subjects as would divert the mind without instructing it. Never consult your own fancy in the choice of subjects, but the necessities of your flock.” Bishop Wilson.

“Quid prodest tibi, alta de Trinitate disputare: si careas hiimilitate, undo displiceas Trinitati? Vere, alta verba non faciunt sanctum et justum: sed virtuosa vita, efficit Deo charum. Opto magis sentire compunctionem, quam scire ejus definitionem. Si scires totam Bibliam exterius, et omnium philosophorum dicta: quid totum prodesset sine charitate Dei et gratia? Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas præter amare Deum et illi soli servire. Ista est summa sapientia, per contemptum mundi tendere ad regna cœlestia.

Thomas a Kempis.

disqualifies us for a Christian judgment of others, as a want of knowledge of ourselves; while nothing so shuts up the avenues to this knowledge and quenches the spirit that prays to forgive as it hopes to be forgiven, as pride. While, therefore, we shrink not from a due exercise of discipline in our congregations, it behoves us to temper that discipline by a self-abasing view of our own ill-desert;⁴² that we may strive rather to amend than to punish,—to separate the transgressor from his sins, than from the communion of saints.

In an equal degree, too, will the disagreements and oppositions incident to the sacred office call for humility. “In meekness instruct those who oppose themselves,”⁴³ is the rule of an apostle; and a rule both beautifully illustrated in the ministry of our Lord, and convincingly enforced by the experience of his most devoted servants.⁴⁴ Greatly do we err when we suppose that opposers need nothing to disarm their opposition but *evidence of the truth*. Alas! the source of the evil is oftenest in the *heart*; and the meekness and humility of the teacher have, many a time, prevailed to open the closed breast, and find their way into the affections and the confidence, where argument has tried in vain. Pride will excite me to *argue*; but humility will persuade them to *learn*. And as Richard Baxter says, “in a learning way, men are ready to receive the truth, but in a disputing (or arguing) way they come armed against it with prejudice and animosity.” “Overcome evil with good” is another apostolic rule, not less applicable nor less urgently commended by the voice of experience.⁴⁵ Our charity must indeed “rejoice in the truth,”⁴⁶ but it must not call down fire from heaven to consume those who differ from us. And the only way in which we can learn to escape this blinded and injurious zeal, is to learn, at the feet of our Master, “what spirit we are off;” to cherish, there, a humbling sense of our great deficiencies and misjudgments. Besides, “a soft answer turneth away wrath;” and such an answer humility alone can give. This is the grace which enables us to return good for evil; blessing

⁴² “They whose duty it is to punish offenders, should take care not to be influenced by pride, but to punish with reluctance, with compassion, as having a sense of their own misery and weakness, which perhaps render them more guilty in the sight of God.” Bishop Wilson.

⁴³ Timothy, 2: 25.

⁴⁴ “A prudent condescension has often prevailed upon men, and rendered them capable of hearkening to reason, when the contrary conduct would have removed them farther from the light.” Bishop Wilson.

⁴⁵ “When Musculus visited the Anabaptists in prison, and conversed kindly and lovingly with them, and showed them all the love he could, and never talked to them of their opinions, they who were wont to call him a deceiver and false prophet, did entreat him to instruct them, and received his instructions.” Baxter.

for cursing; to breathe the spirit of our suffering Master, “who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself,⁴⁶—”who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to Him who judgeth righteously.”⁴⁷ And a double portion of this grace will be needed “when we are wounded in the house of our friends,”—assailed by those who profess the same faith with us, and hold the same fellowship,—charged with being formalists, and adhering to a religion of forms. But we must supplicate for such a portion of this grace; we must humble ourselves, and show by our *humility*—not by proudly arrogating to ourselves a peculiar sanctity—that we are disciples indeed of the meek and lowly JESUS.

Again, humility alone can protect us against the evil influence of a popular or successful ministry.⁴⁸ One who is thus prospered is likely to become with the people a kind of oracle, to receive from them a degree of homage due only to the divine teacher. “*Si minister verbi laudatur,*” saith Augustine, “*versatur in periculo.*” If he would escape this danger, he must hide himself in the depths of “lowliness;” and should the sweet incense of praise penetrate even there—should the temptation be insinuated, even to *ascend* the pinnacle of the temple, let him say, “Get thee hence, Satan.”⁴⁹ “We value ourselves,” says Quesnel, “upon rejecting gross commendations and extravagant flattery, because we would not make ourselves ridiculous. But when the praise is fine and delicate, and the incense prepared with art, how seldom is it that we do not suffer ourselves to be intoxicated thereby.” Shun, then, my young brethren, the adulation of man that must die, and with the apostle, “most gladly glory in your infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon you.”⁵⁰ Reject the

⁴⁶ Heb. 12:3.

⁴⁷ 1 Pet. 2:3. “Consider the patience of your great Master—with what compassion he treated sinners; transcribe his example; and if any of your flock are perverse, froward, obstinate, bear with them, condescend to their weakness, and strive to reduce them even against their wills. But has this been my way? Very far from it. I have been impatient when any of my flock have not been bettered by my care and pains; and this not from a true zeal for the glory of God and the good of souls, but too often, alas! from a principle of self-love. Angry, because I have been so conceited as to think that my labours should not be in vain. And yet how often has God spoken to me myself, and I regarded it not? How long was his grace ineffectual, even with myself! O, Jesu! impart to me a portion of that spirit of meekness which prevailed with thee, to preach to a people who regarded thee not, who despised, who crucified thee. Then why should I, who am a sinner, complain of my unsuccessful labours?” Bishop Wilson.

⁴⁸ “Opposition and evil treatment are less to be feared by a minister of Christ than applause and commendation.” Bishop Wilson.

⁴⁹ Matt. 4:10.

⁵⁰ See also 1 Peter, 4: 14.

offered praise of men as that which you deserve not; and learn to say from the heart, as you are taught to say with the lips, in the brightest hour of your success, “we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.”

Finally, the steady exercise of humility is essential to sustain us under the discouragements of our ministry⁵¹—or what we are prone to consider discouragements—the want of immediate and abundant fruits. The complaint here may sometimes, perhaps, arise from a real concern for the kingdom of Christ; but much oftener from a concern about our own reputation in the matter. We make an extravagant estimate of the value of our services to the church; “think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think;” and because this estimate is not immediately realized in the results of our ministry we become disheartened and miserable, whereas we have reason to be thankful that we have not received a still more mortifying and grievous rebuke to our pride, from Him “who is jealous of his honour;” for our inquietude manifestly proceeds from the false principle, that every thing depends upon us, and that we are to have the glory of the achievement. When the truly humble man discovers, as he often will, a small return of his labour,⁵² his first inquiry will be, “have I been faithful to my trust?” and if conscience testifies that in no important case he has failed, he will tranquilly and joyfully, with a firm faith and a good courage, commit himself and his work to the Master who sent him, and labour on, looking to GOD for the increase, and to heaven, through CHRIST, for his reward.⁵³

Beloved in the Lord, may GOD bless you in your high pursuits, with all spiritual blessings in CHRIST JESUS: most of all, may he give you a *humble heart*—keep you in prostration of spirit at the cross of your Redeemer.

⁵¹ “He who loses courage under oppositions, is even yet a stranger to the ways of the Gospel.” Bishop Wilson.

⁵² “If God suffers a holy pastor not presently to see the fruit of his labours, it is to convince him that the success of his labours belongs to God; that he ought to humble himself, and pray much, and fear lest the fault be in himself.” Bishop Wilson.

⁵³ “As ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolations. 2 Cor. 1:7. ‘O Lord, remove from me all inward disquiet, and grant that, with an entire submission to thy will, I may ever preserve a peace of mind, and leave my deliverance to thy choice. It is the part of the minister of Christ to labour without ceasing,—to suffer without resentment,—and to leave his cause in the hands of God, with full trust in Him.’” Bishop Wilson.

ALMIGHTY and EVERLASTING GOD, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour, JESUS CHRIST, to take upon Him our flesh, and suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility; mercifully grant that we may both follow the example of His patience, and also be made partakers of His resurrection, through the same JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Amen.