

The Christians Oversight of Himself

A Sermon by Richard Baxter

Let us consider, what it is to take heed to ourselves.

1. See that the work of saving grace be thoroughly wrought in your own souls. Take heed to yourselves, lest you be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual working of that gospel which you preach; and lest, while you proclaim to the world the necessity of a Saviour, your own hearts should neglect him, and you should miss of an interest in him and his saving benefits. Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish, while you call upon others to take heed of perishing; and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare food for them. Though there is a promise of shining as the stars, to those 'who turn many to righteousness,' that is but on supposition that they are first turned to it themselves. Their own sincerity in the faith is the condition of their glory, simply considered, though their great ministerial labours may be a condition of the promise of their greater glory. Many have warned others that they come not to that place of torment, while yet they hastened to it themselves: many a preacher is now in hell, who hath a hundred times called upon his hearers to use the utmost care and diligence to escape it. Can any reasonable man imagine that God should save men for offering salvation to others, while they refuse it themselves; and for telling others those truths which they themselves neglect and abuse? Many a tailor goes in rags, that maketh costly clothes for others; and many a cook scarcely licks his fingers, when he hath dressed for others the most costly dishes. Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, and consequently faithful in his Master's work. Take heed, therefore, to ourselves first, that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which you persuade them to believe, and heartily entertain that Saviour whom you offer to them. He that bade you love your neighbours as yourselves, did imply that you should love yourselves, and not hate and destroy yourselves and them.

It is a fearful thing to be an unsanctified professor, but much more to be an unsanctified preacher.

Doth it not make you tremble when you open the Bible, lest you should there read the sentence of your own condemnation? When you pen your sermons, little do you think that you are drawing up indictments against your own souls! When you are arguing against sin, that you are aggravating your own! When you proclaim to your hearers the unsearchable riches of Christ and his grace, that you are publishing your own iniquity in rejecting them, and your unhappiness in being destitute of them! What can you do in persuading men to Christ, in drawing them from the world, in urging them to a life of faith and holiness, but conscience, if it were awake, would tell you, that you speak all this to your own confusion? If you speak of hell, you speak of your own inheritance: if you describe the joys of heaven, you describe your own misery, seeing you have no right to 'the inheritance of the saints in light.' What can you say, for the most part, but it will be against your own souls? O miserable life! that a man should study and preach against himself, and spend his days in a course of self-condemnation! A graceless, inexperienced preacher is one of the most unhappy creatures upon earth and yet he is ordinarily very insensible of his unhappiness; for he hath so many counters that seem like the gold of saving grace, and so many splendid stones that resemble Christian jewels, that he is seldom troubled with the thoughts of his poverty; but thinks he is 'rich, and increased in goods, and stands in need of nothing, when he is poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.' He is acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, he is exercised in holy duties, he liveth not in open disgraceful sin, he serveth at God's altar, he reproveth other men's faults, and preacheth up holiness both of heart and life; and how can this man choose but be holy? Oh what aggravated misery is this, to perish in the midst of plenty! – to famish with the bread of life in our hands, while we offer it to others, and urge it on them! That those ordinances of God should be the occasion of our delusion, which are instituted to be the means of our conviction and salvation! And that while we hold the looking-glass of the gospel to others, to show them the face and aspect of their souls, we should either look on the back part of it ourselves, where we can see nothing, or turn it aside, that it may misrepresent us to ourselves! If such a wretched man would take my counsel, he would make a stand, and call his heart and life to an account, and fall a preaching a while to himself, before he preach any more to others. He would consider, whether food in the mouth, that goeth not into the stomach, will nourish; whether he that 'nameth the name of Christ should not depart from iniquity," whether God will hear his prayers, if 'he regard iniquity in his heart," whether it will serve the turn at the day of reckoning to say, 'Lord,

Lord, we have prophesied in thy name,' when he shall hear these awful words, 'Depart from me, I know you not,' and what comfort it will be to Judas, when he has gone to his own place, to remember that he preached with the other apostles, or that he sat with Christ, and was called by him, 'Friend.' When such thoughts as these have entered into their souls, and kindly worked a while upon their consciences, I would advise them to go to their congregation, and preach over Origen's sermon on Psalm 50.16-17. 'But unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy mouth seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.' And when they have read this text, to sit down, and expound and apply it by their tears; and then to make a full and free confession of their sin, and lament their case before the whole assembly, and desire their earnest prayers to God for pardoning and renewing grace; that hereafter they may preach a Saviour whom they know, and may feel what they speak, and may commend the riches of the gospel from their own experience. Alas! it is the common danger and calamity of the Church, to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors, and to have so many men become preachers before they are Christians; who are sanctified by dedication to the altar as the priests of God, before they are sanctified by hearty dedication as the disciples of Christ; and so to worship an unknown God, and to preach an unknown Christ, to pray through an unknown Spirit, to recommend a state of holiness and communion with God, and a glory and a happiness which are all unknown, and like to be unknown to them for ever. He is like to be but a heartless preacher, that hath not the Christ and grace that he preacheth, in his heart. O that all our students in our universities would well consider this! What a poor business is it to themselves, to spend their time in acquiring some little knowledge of the works of God, and of some of those names which the divided tongues of the nations have imposed on them, and not to know God himself, nor exalt him in their hearts, nor to be acquainted with that one renewing work that should make them happy! They do but 'walk in a vain show,' and spend their lives like dreaming men, while they busy their wits and tongue about abundance of names and notions, and are strangers to God and the life of saints. If ever God awaken them by his saving grace, they will have cogitations and employments so much more serious than their unsanctified studies and disputations, that they will confess they did but dream before. A world of business they make themselves about nothing, while they are wilful strangers to the primitive, independent, necessary Being, who is all in all. Nothing can be rightly known, if God be not

known; nor is any study well managed, nor to any great purpose, if God is not studied. We know little of the creature, till we know it as it stands related to the Creator: single letters, and syllables uncomposed, are no better than nonsense. He who overlooketh him who is the 'Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending,' and seeth not him in all who is the All of all, doth see nothing at all. All creatures, as such, are broken syllables; they signify nothing as separated from God. Were they separated actually, they would cease to be, and the separation would be an annihilation; and when we separate them in our fancies, we make nothing of them to ourselves. It is one thing to know the creatures as Aristotle, and another thing to know them as a Christian. None but a Christian can read one line of his Physics so as to understand it rightly. It is a high and excellent study, and of greater use than many apprehend; but it is the smallest part of it that Aristotle can teach us.

When man was made perfect, and placed in a perfect world, where all things were in perfect order, the whole creation was then man's book, in which he was to read the nature and will of his great Creator. Every creature had the name of God so legibly engraven on it, that man might run and read it. He could not open his eyes, but he might see some image of God; but nowhere so fully and lively as in himself. It was, therefore, his work to study the whole volume of nature, but first and most to study himself. And if man had held on in this course, he would have continued and increased in the knowledge of God and himself; but when he would needs know and love the creature and himself in a way of separation from God, he lost the knowledge both of the creature and of the Creator, so far as it could beatify and was worth the name of knowledge; and instead of it, he hath got the unhappy knowledge which he affected, even the empty notions and fantastic knowledge of the creature and himself, as thus separated. And thus, he that lived to the Creator, and upon him, doth now live to and upon the other creatures, and on himself; and thus, 'Every man at his best estate' (the learned as well as the illiterate) 'is altogether vanity. Surely every man walketh in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain.' And it must be well observed, that as God laid not aside the relation of a Creator by becoming our Redeemer, relation, but the work of redemption standeth, in some respect, in subordination to that of creation, and the law of the Redeemer to the law of the Creator; so also the duties which we owed to God as Creator have not ceased, but the duties that we owe to the Redeemer, as such, are subordinate thereto. It is the work of Christ to bring us back to God, and to restore us to the

perfection of holiness and obedience; and as he is the way to the Father, so faith in him is the way to our former employment and enjoyment of God. I hope you perceive what I aim at in all this, namely, that to see God in his creatures, and to love him, and converse with him, was the employment of man in his upright state; that this is so far from ceasing to be our duty, that it is the work of Christ to bring us, by faith, back to it; and therefore the most holy men are the most excellent students of God's works, and none but the holy can rightly study them or know them. 'His works are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein,' but not for themselves, but for him that made them. Your study of physics and other sciences is not worth a rush, if it be not God that you seek after in them. To see and admire, to reverence and adore, to love and delight in God, as exhibited in his works – this is the true and only philosophy; the contrary is mere foolery, and is so called again and again by God himself. This is the sanctification of your studies, when they are devoted to God, and when he is the end, the object, and the life of them all.

And, therefore, I shall presume to tell you, by the way, that it is a grand error, and of dangerous consequence in Christian academies, (pardon the censure from one so unfit to pass it, seeing the necessity of the case commandeth it,) that they study the creature before the Redeemer, and set themselves to physics, and metaphysics, and mathematics, before they set themselves to theology; whereas, no man that hath not the vitals of theology, is capable of going beyond a fool in philosophy. Theology must lay the foundation, and lead the way of all our studies. If God must be searched after, in our search of the creature, (and we must affect no separated knowledge of them) then tutors must read God to their pupils in all; and divinity must be the beginning, the middle, the end, the life, the all, of their studies. Our physics and metaphysics must be reduced to theology; and nature must be read as one of God's books, which is purposely written for the revelation of himself.

The Holy Scripture is the easier book: when you have first learned from it God, and his will, as to the most necessary things, address yourselves to the study of his works, and read every creature as a Christian and a divine. If you see not yourselves, and all things, as living, and moving, and having being in God, you see nothing, whatever you think you see. If you perceive not, in your study of the creatures, that God is all, and in all, and that 'of him, and through him, and to him, are all things,' you may think, perhaps, that you 'know something; but you know nothing as you ought to know.' Think not so basely of your physics, and of the

works of God, as that they are only preparatory studies for boys. It is a most high and noble part of holiness, to search after, behold admire, and love the great Creator in all his works. How much have the saints of God been employed in this high and holy exercise! The book of Job, and the Psalms, may show us that our physics are not so little kin to theology as some suppose.

I do, therefore, in zeal for the good of the Church, and their own success in their most necessary labours, propound it for the consideration of all pious tutors, whether they should not as timely, and as diligently, read to their pupils, or cause them to read, the chief parts of practical divinity (and there is no other), as any of the sciences; and whether they should not go together from the very first? It is well that they hear sermons; but that is not enough. If tutors would make it their principal business to acquaint their pupils with the doctrine of salvation, and labour to set it home upon their hearts, that all might be received according to its weight, and read to their hearts as well as to their heads, and so carry on the rest of their instructions, that it may appear they make them but subservient unto this, and that their pupils may feel what they aim at in them all; and so that they would teach all their philosophy in habitu theologico, – this might be a happy means to make a happy Church and a happy country. But, when languages and philosophy have almost all their time and diligence, and, instead of reading philosophy like divines, they read divinity like philosophers, as if it were a thing of no more moment than a lesson of music, or arithmetic, and not the doctrine of everlasting life; – this it is that blasteth so many in the bud, and pestereth the Church with unsanctified teachers!

Hence it is, that we have so many worldlings to preach of the invisible felicity, and so many carnal men to declare the mysteries of the Spirit; and I would I might not say, so many infidels to preach Christ, or so many atheists to preach the living God: and when they are taught philosophy before or without religion, what wonder if their philosophy be all or most of their religion!

Again, therefore, I address myself to all who have the charge of the education of youth, especially in order to preparation for the ministry. You, that are schoolmasters and tutors, begin and end with the things of God. Speak daily to the hearts of your scholars those things that must be wrought into their hearts, or else they are undone. Let some piercing words fall frequently from your mouths, of God, and the state of their souls, and the life to come.

Do not say, they are too young to understand and entertain them. You little know what impressions they may make. Not only the soul of the boy, but many souls may have cause to bless God, for your zeal and diligence, yea, for one such seasonable word. You have a great advantage above others to do them good; you have them before they are grown to maturity, and they will hear you when they will not hear another. If they are destined to the ministry, you are preparing them for the special service of God, and must they not first have the knowledge of him whom they have to serve? Oh think with yourselves, what a sad thing it will be to their own souls, and what a wrong to the Church of God, if they come out from you with common and carnal hearts, to so great and holy and spiritual a work! Of a hundred students in one of our colleges, how many may there be that are serious, experienced, godly young men! If you should send one half of them on a work which they are unfit for, what cruel work will they make in the Church or country! Whereas, if you be the means of their conversion and sanctification, how many souls may bless you, and what greater good can you do the Church? When once their hearts are savingly affected with the doctrine which they study and preach, they will study it more heartily, and preach it more heartily: their own experience will direct them to the fittest subjects, and will furnish them with matter, and quicken them to set it home to the conscience of their hearers.

See, therefore, that you make not work for the groans and lamentation of the Church, nor for the great tormentor of the murderers of souls.

2. Content not yourselves with being in a state of grace, but be also careful that your graces are kept in vigorous and lively exercise, and that you preach to yourselves the sermons which you study, before you preach them to others. If you did this for your own sakes, it would not be lost labour; but I am speaking to you upon the public account, that you would do it for the sake of the Church. When your minds are in a holy, heavenly frame, your people are likely to partake of the fruits of it. Your prayers, and praises, and doctrine will be sweet and heavenly to them. They will likely feel when you have been much with God: that which is most on your hearts, is like to be most in their ears. I confess I must speak it by lamentable experience, that I publish to my flock the distempers of my own soul. When I let my heart grow cold, my preaching is cold; and when it is confused, my preaching is confused; and so I can oft observe also in the best of my hearers, that when I have grown cold in preaching, they have grown cold too; and the next prayers which I have heard from

them have been too like my preaching. We are the nurses of Christ's little ones. If we forbear taking food ourselves, we shall famish them; it will soon be visible in their leanness, and dull discharge of their several duties. If we let our love decline, we are not like to raise up theirs.

If we abate our holy care and fear, it will appear in our preaching: if the matter show it not, the manner will. If we feed on unwholesome food, either errors or fruitless controversies, our hearers are like to fare the worse for it. Whereas, if we abound in faith, and love, and zeal, how would it overflow to the refreshing of our congregations, and how would it appear in the increase of the same graces in them! O brethren, watch therefore over your own hearts: keep out lusts and passions, and worldly inclinations; keep up the life of faith, and love, and zeal: be much at home, and be much with God. If it be not your daily business to study your own hearts, and to subdue corruption, and to walk with God – if you make not this a work to which you constantly attend, all will go wrong, and you will starve your hearers; or, if you have an affected fervency, you cannot expect a blessing to attend it from on high. Above all, be much in secret prayer and meditation.

Thence you must fetch the heavenly fire that must kindle your sacrifices: remember, you cannot decline and neglect your duty, to your own hurt alone; many will be losers by it as well as you. For your people's sakes, therefore, look to your hearts. If a pang of spiritual pride should overtake you, and you should fall into any dangerous error, and vent your own inventions to draw away disciples after you, what a wound may this prove to the Church, of which you have the oversight; and you may become a plague to them instead of a blessing, and they may wish they had never seen your faces. Oh, therefore, take heed to your own judgments and affections. Vanity and error will slyly insinuate, and seldom come without fair pretences: great distempers and apostasies have usually small beginnings. The prince of darkness doth frequently personate an angel of light, to draw the children of light again into darkness. How easily also will distempers creep in upon our affections and our first love, and fear and care abate! Watch, therefore, for the sake of yourselves and others.

But, besides this general course of watchfulness, methinks a minister should take some special pains with his heart, before he is to go to the congregation: if it be then cold, how is he likely to warm the hearts of his hearers? Therefore, go then specially to God for life: read some rousing, awakening book, or meditate on the weight of the subject of which you are to

Speak, and on the great necessity of your people's souls, that you may go in the zeal of the Lord into his house.

Maintain, in this manner, the life of grace in yourselves, that it may appear in all your sermons from the pulpit, – that everyone who comes cold to the assembly, may have some warmth imparted to him before he depart.

3. Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling-blocks before the blind, as may be the occasion of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours. It much hindereth our work, when other men are all the week long contradicting to poor people in private, that which we have been speaking to them from the Word of God in public, because we cannot be at hand to expose their folly; but it will much more hinder your work, if you contradict yourselves, and if your actions give your tongue the lie, and if you build up an hour or two with your mouths, and all the week after pull down with your hands! This is the way to make men think that the Word of God is but an idle tale, and to make preaching seem no better than prating. He that means as he speaks, will surely do as he speaks. One proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon, and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing. Tell me, brethren, in the fear of God, do you regard the success of your labours, or do you not? Do you long to see it upon the souls of your hearers? If you do not, what do you preach for; what do you study for; and what do you call yourselves the ministers of Christ for? But if you do, then surely you cannot find in your heart to mar your work for a thing of nought. What! do you regard the success of your labours, and yet will not part with a little to the poor, nor put up with an injury, or a foul word, nor stoop to the meanest, nor forbear your passionate or lordly carriage, – no, not for the winning of souls, and attaining the end of all your labours! You little value success, indeed, that will sell it at so cheap a rate, or will not do so small a matter to attain it. It is a palpable error of some ministers, who make such a disproportion between their preaching and their living; who study hard to preach exactly, and study little or not at all to live exactly. All the week long is little enough, to study how to speak two hours; and yet one hour seems too much to study how to live all the week. They are loath to misplace a word in their sermons, or to be guilty of any notable infirmity, (and I blame them not, for the matter is holy and weighty,) but they

make nothing of misplacing affections, words, and actions, in the course of their lives. Oh how curiously have I heard some men preach; and how carelessly have I seen them live! They have been so accurate as to the preparation of their sermons, that seldom preaching seemed to them a virtue, that their language might be the more polite, and all the rhetorical writers they could meet with were pressed to serve them for the adorning of their style, (and gauds were oft their chiefest ornaments.) They were so nice in hearing others, that no man pleased them that spoke as he thought, or that drowned not affections, or dulled not, or distempered not the heart by the predominant strains of a fantastic wit. And yet, when it came to matter of practice, and they were once out of church, how incurious were the men, and how little did they regard what they said or did, so it were not so palpably gross as to dishonour them! They that preach precisely, would not live precisely! What a difference was there between their pulpit speeches and their familiar discourse?

They that were most impatient of barbarisms, solecisms, and paralogisms in a sermon, could easily tolerate them in their life and conversation.

Certainly, brethren, we have very great cause to take heed what we do, as well as what we say: if we will be the servants of Christ indeed, we must not be tongue servants only, but must serve him with our deeds, and be 'doers of the work, that we may be blessed in our deed.' As our people must be 'doers of the word, and not hearers only,' so we must be doers and not speakers only, lest we 'deceive our own selves.' A practical doctrine must be practically preached. We must study as hard how to live well, as how to preach well. We must think and think again, how to compose our lives, as may most tend to men's salvation, as well as our sermons.

When you are studying what to say to your people, if you have any concern for their souls, you will oft be thinking with yourself, 'How shall I get within them? and what shall I say, that is most likely to convince them, and convert them, and promote their salvation!' And should you not as diligently think with yourself, 'How shall I live, and what shall I do, and how shall I dispose of all that I have, as may most tend to the saving of men's souls?' Brethren, if the saving of souls be your end, you will certainly intend it out of the pulpit as well as in it! If it be your end, you will live for it, and contribute all your endeavours to attain it. You will ask concerning the money in your purse, as well as concerning the word of your mouth, 'In what way shall I lay it out for the greatest good, especially to men's souls?' Oh that this were your

daily study, how to use your wealth, your friends, and all you have for God, as well as your tongues! Then should we see that fruit of your labours, which is never else like to be seen. If you intend the end of the ministry in the pulpit only, it would seem you take yourselves for ministers no longer than you are there. And, if so, I think you are unworthy to be esteemed ministers at all.

Let me then entreat you, brethren, to do well, as well as say well. Be 'zealous of good works.' Spare not for any cost, if it may promote your Master's work.

(1) Maintain your innocence, and walk without offense. Let your lives condemn sin, and persuade men to duty. Would you have your people more careful of their souls, than you are of yours? If you would have them redeem their time, do not you mis-spend yours. If you would not have them vain in their conference, see that you speak yourselves the things which may edify, and tend to 'minister grace to the hearers.' Order your own families well, if you would have them do so by theirs. Be not proud and lordly, if you would have them to be lowly. There are no virtues wherein your example will do more, at least to abate men's prejudice, than humility and meekness and self-denial. Forgive injuries; and 'be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.' Do as our Lord, 'who, when he was reviled, reviled not again.' If sinners be stubborn and stout and contemptuous, flesh and blood will persuade you to take up their weapons, and to master them by their carnal means: but that is not the way, (further than necessary self-preservation or public good may require,) but overcome them with kindness and patience and gentleness. The former may show that you have more worldly power than they (wherein yet they are ordinarily too hard for the faithful); but it is the latter only that will tell them that you excel them in spiritual excellency. If you believe that Christ is more worthy of imitation than Caesar or Alexander, and that it is more glory to be a Christian than to be a conqueror, yea to be a man than a beast – which often exceed us in strength – contend with charity, and not with violence; set meekness and love and patience against force, and not force against force. Remember, you are obliged to be the servants of all.

'Condescend to men of low estate.' Be not strange to the poor of your flock; they are apt to take your strangeness for contempt. Familiarity, improved to holy ends, may do abundance of good. Speak not stoutly or disrespectfully to any one; but be courteous to the meanest, as to your equal in Christ. A kind and winning carriage is a cheap way of doing men good.

(2) Let me entreat you to abound in works of charity and benevolence. Go to the poor, and see what they want, and show your compassion at once to their soul and body. Buy them a catechism, and other small books that are likely to do them good, and make them promise to read them with care and attention. Stretch your purse to the utmost, and do all the good you can. Think not of being rich; seek not great things for yourselves or your posterity. What if you do impoverish yourselves to do a greater good; will this be loss or gain? If you believe that God is the safest purse-bearer, and that to expend in his service is the greatest usury, show them that you do believe it. I know that flesh and blood will cavil before it will lose its prey, and will never want somewhat to say against this duty that is against its interest; but mark what I say (and the Lord set it home upon your hearts), that man who hath anything in the world so dear to him, that he cannot spare it for Christ, if he call for it, is no true Christian. And because a carnal heart will not believe that Christ calls for it when he cannot spare it, and, therefore, makes that his self-deceiving shift, I say further, that the man who will not be persuaded that duty is duty, because he cannot spare that for Christ which is therein to be expended, is no true Christian; for a false heart corrupteth the understanding, and that again increaseth the delusions of the heart. Do not take it, therefore, as an undoing, to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness and to lay up treasure in heaven, though you leave yourselves but little on earth. You lose no great advantage for heaven, by becoming poor: 'In pursuing one's way, the lighter one travels the better.'

I know, where the heart is carnal and covetous, words will not wring men's money out of their hands; they can say all this, and more to others; but saying is one thing, and believing is another.

But with those that are true believers, methinks such considerations should prevail. O what abundance of good might ministers do, if they would but live in contempt of the world, and the riches and glory thereof, and expend all they have in their Master's service, and pinch their flesh, that they may have wherewith to do good! This would unlock more hearts to the reception of their doctrine, than all their oratory; and, without this, singularity in religion will seem but hypocrisy; and it is likely that it is so. 'He who practises disinterestedness prays to the Lord; he who snatches a man from peril offers a rich sacrifice; these are our sacrifices; these are holy to God. Thus he who is more devout among us is he who is more self-effacing,' saith Minucius Felix. Though we need not do as the papists, who betake

themselves to monasteries, and cast away property, yet we must have nothing but what we have for God.

4. Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those sins which you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which daily you condemn. Will you make it your work to magnify God, and, when you have done, dishonour him as much as others? Will you proclaim Christ's governing power, and yet contemn it, and rebel yourselves? Will you preach his laws, and wilfully break them? If sin be evil, why do you live in it? If it be not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it be dangerous, how dare you venture on it? if it be not, why do you tell men so? If God's threatenings be true, why do you not fear them? if they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them, and put them into such frights without a cause? Do you 'know the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death,' and yet will you do them? 'Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery,' or be drunk, or covetous, art thou such thyself? 'Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?' What! shall the same tongue speak evil that speakest against evil? Shall those lips censure, and slander, and backbite your neighbour, that cry down these and the like things in others? Take heed to yourselves, lest you cry down sin, and yet do not overcome it; lest, while you seek to bring it down in others, you bow to it, and become its slaves yourselves: 'For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage.' 'To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness.' O brethren! it is easier to chide at sin, than to overcome it.

Lastly, take heed to yourselves, that you want not the qualifications necessary for your work.

He must not be himself a babe in knowledge, that will teach men all those mysterious things which must be known in order to salvation. O what qualifications are necessary for a man who hath such a charge upon him as we have! How many difficulties in divinity to be solved! and these, too, about the fundamental principles of religion! How many obscure texts of Scripture to be expounded!

How many duties to be performed, wherein ourselves and others may miscarry, if in the matter, and manner, and end, we be not well informed! How many sins to be avoided,

which, without understanding and foresight cannot be done! What a number of sly and subtle temptations must we open to our people's eyes, that they may escape them! How many weighty and yet intricate cases of conscience have we almost daily to resolve! And can so much work, and such work as this, be done by raw, unqualified men? O what strong holds have we to batter, and how many of them!

What subtle and obstinate resistance must we expect from every heart we deal with! Prejudice hath so blocked up our way, that we can scarcely procure a patient hearing. We cannot make a breach in their groundless hopes and carnal peace, but they have twenty shifts and seeming reasons to make it up again; and twenty enemies, that are seeming friends, are ready to help them. We dispute not with them upon equal terms. We have children to reason with, that cannot understand us. We have distracted men (in spirituals) to argue with, that will bawl us down with raging nonsense. We have wilful, unreasonable people to deal with, who, when they are silenced, are never the more convinced, and who, when they can give you no reason, will give you their resolution; like the man that Salvian had to deal with, who, being resolved to devour a poor man's substance, and being entreated by him to forbear, replied, 'He could not grant his request, for he had made a vow to take it,' so that the preacher, by reason of this most religious evil deed, was fain to depart. We dispute the case against men's wills and passions, as much as against their understandings; and these have neither reason nor ears. Their best arguments are, 'I will not believe you, nor all the preachers in the world, in such things. I will not change my mind, or life; I will not leave my sins; I will never be so precise, come of it what will.' We have not one, but multitudes of raging passions, and contradicting enemies, to dispute against at once, whenever we go about the conversion of a sinner; as if a man were to dispute in a fair or a tumult, or in the midst of a crowd of violent scolds. What equal dealing, and what success, could here be expected? Yet such is our work; and it is a work that must be done.

O brethren! what men should we be in skill, resolution, and unwearied diligence, who have all this to do? Did Paul cry out, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' And shall we be proud, or careless, or lazy, as if we were sufficient? As Peter saith to every Christian, in consideration of our great approaching change, 'What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!' so may I say to every minister, 'Seeing all these things lie upon our hands, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy endeavours and resolutions

for our work!’ This is not a burden for the shoulders of a child. What skill doth every part of our work require! – and of how much moment is every part! To preach a sermon, I think, is not the hardest part; and yet what skill is necessary to make the truth plain; to convince the hearers, to let irresistible light in to their consciences, and to keep it there, and drive all home; to screw the truth into their minds, and work Christ into their affections; to meet every objection, and clearly to resolve it; to drive sinners to a stand, and make them see that there is no hope, but that they must unavoidably either be converted or condemned – and to do all this, as regards language and manner, as beseems our work, and yet as is most suitable to the capacities of our hearers. This, and a great deal more that should be done in every sermon, must surely require a great deal of holy skill. So great a God, whose message we deliver, should be honoured by our delivery of it. It is a lamentable case, that in a message from the God of heaven, of everlasting moment to the souls of men, we should behave ourselves so weakly, so unhandsomely, so imprudently, or so slightly, that the whole business should miscarry in our hands, and God should be dishonoured, and his work disgraced, and sinners rather hardened than converted; and all this through our weakness or neglect! How often have carnal hearers gone home jeering at the palpable and dishonourable failings of the preacher! How many sleep under us, because our hearts and tongues are sleepy, and we bring not with us so much skill and zeal as to awake them! Moreover, what skill is necessary to defend the truth against gainsayers, and to deal with disputing cavillers, according to their several modes and case! And if we fail through weakness, how will they exult over us! Yet that is the smallest matter: but who knows how many weak ones may thereby be perverted, to their own undoing, and to the trouble of the Church? What skill is necessary to deal in private with one poor ignorant soul for his conversion! O brethren! do you not shrink and tremble under the sense of all this work? Will a common measure of holy skill and ability, of prudence and other qualifications, serve for such a task as this? I know necessity may cause the Church to tolerate the weak; but woe to us, if we tolerate and indulge our own weakness! Do not reason and conscience tell you, that if you dare venture on so high a work as this, you should spare no pains to be qualified for the performance of it? It is not now and then an idle snatch or taste of studies that will serve to make an able and sound divine. I know that laziness hath learned to allege the vanity of all our studies, and how entirely the Spirit must qualify us for, and assist us in our work; as if God commanded us the use of means, and then warranted us to neglect them; as

if it were his way to cause us to thrive in a course of idleness, and to bring us to knowledge by dreams when we are asleep, or to take us up into heaven, and show us his counsels, while we think of no such matter, but are idling away our time on earth! O that men should dare, by their laziness, to 'quench the Spirit,' and then pretend the Spirit for the doing of it! 'O outrageous, shameful and unnatural deed!' God hath required us, that we be 'not slothful in business,' but 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' Such we must provoke our hearers to be, and such we must be ourselves. O, therefore, brethren, lose no time! Study, and pray, and confer, and practice; for in these four ways your abilities must be increased. Take heed to yourselves, lest you are weak through your own negligence, and lest you mar the work of God by your weakness.