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SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE

OF A

CALL TO THE WORK

OF

THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

U.S. Plummer.

P R E F A C E .

SOME years ago, the writer was entrusted, by the Presbytery of which he was then a member, with the special care of that branch of their operations which relates to the education of pious, but indigent young men for the Ministry. In fulfilling this appointment, frequent demands were made for information on the subject of a call to that work. No satisfactory essay on the subject was known. Things being thus, private application was made to several fathers in the Church to write such an essay for publication, but without success. Being thus left, and by office being called to give information, the writer at length reduced his thoughts to something like system; and early in April, 1831, preached the following Sermon before the students of the Union Theological Seminary, (Va.) Soon after, an article appeared in the *Biblical Repertory* on the same subject. The author has also within a few days learned, that the excellent Thomas Boston published a sermon on this subject, and founded on the portion of Scripture which stands at the head of this Discourse. Although he has never seen Mr. Boston's discourse, it is believed

that he, like the valuable writer in the Repertory, treats the subject in a manner applicable to those who are in the Ministry, or about to enter it, rather than to those who *think of taking measures that may finally lead to that sacred office*. Respecting the sameness of texts, the language of another on a similar occasion is appropriate. "The coincidence was entirely accidental; and the text in each instance being employed very much in the manner of a motto, it is hoped the train of thought will be found sufficiently distinct." So much for the history of this Sermon. The serious attention of the reader is invited to a few remarks concerning

THE SPIRIT WITH WHICH THIS SUBJECT OUGHT TO BE
STUDIED.

That any subject, involving moral truth, religious duty, and solemn responsibility, studied in an improper spirit, may be, and most probably will be determined sinfully, is in full accordance with scriptural principle and careful observation. Besides, a wrong spirit is itself highly criminal, even though it govern not final decisions. If, then, we would innocently inquire into this matter, we must approach it *seriously, solemnly, reverentially*. Thus we ought to approach all subjects of a kindred character—much more, then, this. He who jests,

he who trifles, he who feels no solemn awe, when considering this matter, may well doubt not only his fitness for the Ministry, but the reality of his piety. When God was about to call Moses, and make him a great prophet, He first appeared to him in the burning bush. And when Moses "turned aside to see," God said, "Draw not nigh hither," [remain at a reverential distance]: "put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." "And Moses hid his face." So let all do, who think of becoming "Ambassadors for Christ," "Messengers of the LORD of Hosts." Too much solemnity and holy reverence can not be exercised on this momentous subject.

Another state of the heart, essential to the proper consideration of this matter, is *patient waiting* on God, producing *caution* and *deliberation*. This subject is often introduced in Scripture in reference to our doubts and difficulties and darkness, and is often of unlimited application. If any think otherwise, an examination of those passages of revealed truth, in which the words *wait* and *haste* with their variations occur, will satisfy him. Moreover, common observation abundantly proves, that purposes respecting duty, if hastily formed, are either foolish, or hastily abandoned. A man who acts

without due deliberation, is also guilty for so doing, even though his decision be materially right, and carried into effect. *Humility*, producing candor, and a willingness to estimate "according to truth," one's deficiencies and qualifications, is also indispensable. In this inquiry, "Pope Self," is one of the important items. He who is entirely ignorant of his faults and deficiencies, his attainments and abilities, cannot judge intelligently or satisfactorily. He who has real piety and much knowledge of himself, must have genuine and deep humility, when he contemplates such an undertaking as that of a Herald of the Cross. Neither will a disposition to deny one's gifts and graces be any less dangerous than an extravagant self-conceit. Humility "thinks soberly, as it ought to think," and "judges true judgment."

Finally. All that is included in the idea of *docility*, is necessary to a right investigation and decision. Of course, the inquirer must possess a deep sense of the folly of mere human wisdom; a spirit of hearty prayer to God for the teaching of the Holy Ghost; a strong desire to know the truth, and an entire willingness to act upon the truth when known. Most, if not all, of the foregoing specifications of spirit are beautifully illustrated in the conduct of Samuel, when God was about to

employ him as a publisher of divine truth, (1 *Samuel* iii. *passim*); and in the conduct of Saul of Tarsus, when his bloody purposes were rebuked, and himself about to be sent to preach Christ crucified. So soon as Saul was arrested, he, "trembling and astonished," [here was reverence,] "said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" [here were prayer for direction, solemn inquiry, and strong desire to know the truth.] His prayer was heard—his inquiry was answered—his patience and submission were tried. He was told to "go into the city," and there learn what he must do. He went, thus manifesting his willingness to obey, and, in obeying, to learn. Soon he did learn, and "preach Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." *Acts* ix. 1—20.

Dear youthful Reader! if you have not the spirit just described, read no further, until you look to God through Christ for the influences of the Holy Ghost, to make you solemn, reverential, humble, candid, deliberate, docile, wise, and holy, in your aims and purposes.

WM. S. PLUMER.

Petersburg, Va. Feb. 14th, 1832.

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CALL TO THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea : for they were fishers. And he said unto them, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And straightway they left their nets and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with their father, mending their nets ; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him. *Matt. iv. 18--22.*

In the verses just read, several things are worthy of notice ; but the leading idea, viz. : The calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John to the discipleship, as a *preparation for the Ministry*, will engage our attention at present. Let us view this subject, so that we may take occasion from it to speak of the nature of a call in general, marking the difference between such a call as may be expected now, and such as we know to have been given in the days of the Apostles. It may not be amiss to make a few general statements, before we enter into particulars.

The first is, that the subject, although plain in theory, is yet of exceedingly difficult application. Modest, hum-

ble, pious men are very apt to be deterred from all thoughts of entering the Ministry, by many considerations which naturally present themselves; while others of doubtful piety, having in their compositions a spice of self-conceit, and a dash of forwardness, frequently derive encouragement from such things as have in truth no application to their cases. Most men must have witnessed such occurrences. Notwithstanding this difficulty, it is our duty to state scriptural principles with all possible plainness, and endeavour in practice to guard carefully against the abuse of them. Some have taught and practised contrary to the opinion just expressed; but without sufficient reason. All duties ought to be explained and enforced, and all privileges fully and wisely declared. The inquiry, "Who ought to study the question—AM I CALLED?"—admits of several answers. The *first* is, *That no person who is without piety need give the matter his attention.* The first thing for him to do, is, to "think on his ways and turn his feet to God's testimonies;" "to repent and believe the Gospel." Again.—*No female is bound to study this subject for personal decision and action.* "I suffer not a woman to teach." 1 Tim. ii. 12. Lastly, *It may be a safe rule for every male member of the Church to inquire, "AM I CALLED?"* In a great majority of cases, even an hour's reflection may show clearly that a negative answer should be given. But that men in Christ, who are not far advanced in life, and possess sound minds, may not dismiss the subject without a moment's serious thought, is exceedingly evident.

But let us proceed to consider the nature of a call.

A call, then, is either extraordinary or ordinary. An

extraordinary call to the Ministry is one given under such circumstances as, in a marvellous and clear manner, show the will of God. Thus the call of these four fishermen was extraordinary, not merely because it was given by Christ, the Head of the Church, (for all genuine calls proceed from him), but because it was given by him in person, and in terms so unequivocal and so plain as to remove all ground of doubt. So also the calling of Barnabas and Saul would seem to have been extraordinary. "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." *Acts* xiii. 2. An extraordinary call, in its very nature, is confined to the days of miracles.

An ordinary call differs from an extraordinary in this, that in ascertaining its reality and genuineness, we pursue the usual course by which duty becomes known, without any supernatural or marvellous indications of the will of God. Such are all calls given since the days of miracles. An ordinary call may be as clear as an extraordinary; yet it must require more patience and longer time to ascertain it. Perhaps Flavel, and Baxter, and Bunyan, and Owen, and Edwards, and Brainerd, had, in the latter part of their lives, no more right to doubt their call, than Paul or Barnabas had. An ordinary call is distinguishable into a general and a special call.

A general call is addressed to the pious generally, and arises from the necessities of the world, and from the great principles of the Bible, which command all Christians to "hold forth the word of life;" to "say,

Come." This general call is a very loud one. Macedonia, by her necessities, cries for help as loudly as she ever did. Hundreds of millions of this world's mortal, yet immortal inhabitants are sinking to endless night "for lack of vision." Gospel precepts are addressed to all the friends of Christ in such manner as requires each one, constrained by amazing love, to stand at his post, and do to the extent of his ability. This general call, however, determines nothing as to the particular method, by the adoption of which, each one shall serve. It barely says to all, "Be strong." "Quit you like men." "Let your light shine." "Glorify him in your bodies and spirits, which are his," &c. &c.

A *special* call to the work of the Ministry is such a concurrence of qualities and events on an individual, as, if explained by the principles of the Bible and of common sense, will make it manifest that the will of God is that he, on whom the concurrence is, should enter the Ministry. This is the call which every man must have, if he would enter the Ministry in an acceptable manner. In determining whether we be thus specially called, we are to give good heed to the word and providences of God as they *separately* shed light on each other, and *unitedly*, on this subject; and we are not to give any heed to strange fancies, and unaccountable impulses, and supposed visions.

The first evidence of a call which we shall notice, is a desire for the work. That this desire is necessary, is very evident from Scripture: "This is a true saying, If a man *desire* the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." 1 Tim. iii. 1. Common sense also revolts at the

thought of a man engaging in a work, in which his heart is not; especially where, as in the Ministry, far more harm than good will be done to all concerned, if the heart be wanting. This desire must not be a transient emotion, but must possess essential permanency. Neither must it be a faint desire, easily overcome by counter-operations. These two ideas of permanency and strength, are certainly included in that word "desire," which first occurs in the passage just quoted. For in the original there are different words corresponding to the English word "desire." The first of these, *ὀρέγεται*, is a word of much more strength than the last, *ἐπιθυμει*. Doddridge translates the former "earnestly desire," the latter simply "desire." This desire must possess at least such permanence and vehemence as to enable one, with the help of God continually sought, to surmount obstacles as they present themselves; to submit to all the delays and labours necessary to prepare for the work; and to make him willing to take the office and work of a minister, and that only, and for life. This desire, too, must be, not for the learned leisure, the fame, the influence, the ease, or the emoluments of the office, but for the *office itself*, taken in connexion with the joys and sorrows, the pains and pleasures, the labours and comforts, the responsibilities and rewards, which God has inseparably connected with a conscientious and faithful discharge of its duties. He that has such a desire, has one quality significant of a call. The more vehement and continuous this desire is, the more weight ought it to have in our determinations.

Another thing of importance in a call, is a deep and abiding sense of personal weakness and unworthiness. In view of the amazing magnitude and tremendous responsibilities, and eternal effects of the work, Paul said: "Who is sufficient for these things?" *2 Cor. ii. 16.* If an inspired apostle, who had been rapt in visions of the third heavens, had such views, is it any wonder that all who have right conceptions of the matter, should "exceedingly fear and quake," when they meditate an entrance on this stupendous undertaking! Neither again need we be surprised, if many who are called, should, at least for a time, shrink from any course that would be construed as a pledge or preparation for induction into the Ministry. Such feel their weakness, lament their unworthiness, know their insufficiency, and draw back with fearfulness. Here is one of those dangerous places where it is possible for one to be led astray, and sin against God. This is the point on which Jeremiah did well nigh err. When God told him that He had "ordained him a prophet," he said, "Ah, Lord God! I cannot speak, for I am a child." *Jer. i. 5, 6.* Humility is commendable, and, if genuine, cannot be excessive. Let one, therefore, look at the promises, and ask help from on high, and then judge whether he be not warranted in expecting "out of weakness to be made strong."

This leads to the remark, that *one part of this call is some comfortable degree of confidence, that, notwithstanding our great unworthiness and insufficiency, God will sustain us.* Thus God assured Jeremiah that he should be supported: "Say not, I am a child; for thou shalt go

to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee shalt thou speak. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord." *Jer. i. 7, 8.* Here was ground of confidence. On it Jeremiah relied. Can you, in view of all that is discouraging in yourself, and in view of all that is encouraging from God, still say, Though I am a worm of the dust, and less than the least of all God's mercies, and the most unworthy of all whom I know, yet God can, and I hope and believe He will bear me up, and bear me through? To this state of holy confidence the apostle refers in these words: "And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament." *2 Cor. iii. 4—6.* Judging from what you can learn of the will of God, honestly, humbly, and earnestly inquired into, can you "trust" that God will "make you an able minister of the New Testament?" If you can, "hold fast your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." If you have never sought the will of God in the right manner, an expectation of support can be but presumption; and the absence of it may only prove your guilt.

Another idea which it may be important distinctly to present, is, *that we put a high estimate on the office itself, and on its appropriate pleasures, and consolations, and work.* This subject has already been alluded to, but it deserves greater prominence in this discussion than it now possesses. He is not fit to be in the Ministry, who cannot find in the discharge of its peculiar duties a satis-

faction which he could not find in any other employment. Were you qualified, could it, would it be your meat and drink to do the work assigned you as a minister of the word of God? Paul says, "I magnify mine office;" as if he had said, "I commend and extol it. As it occupies a large space in my own eye, so I desire it may in the eyes of others." Does it present itself to your mind as "a good work," an excellent employment, in which you would, were it proper, engage rather than in any other service?

To what has been said must be added, *the wishes of judicious, impartial pious, people, (in that part of the Church in which our lot is cast,) and the consent of the proper authorities.* This rule is to be observed in all ordinary cases, as is evident from the example of the apostles and early Christians, in reference to deacons. "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables; wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom ye may appoint over this business, but we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Simon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte

of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." *Acts vi. 1—6.* From this portion of Scripture it is exceedingly evident, that the concurrence of the people's election, and of the ordaining authority's approbation, is necessary to the validity of the commission of even a deacon, whose office extends only to the temporalities of the Church. Much more, then, have the people a right to choose the man who is to be their counsellor, and teacher, and guide. Neither can any sufficient reason be given, why the ordaining authority should not also exercise a control over the matter, at least so far as to decline ordaining persons supposed to be unworthy or unfit. Indeed Paul warns Timothy to "lay hands suddenly on no man;" from which warning, it is manifest that Timothy was bound to exercise his best judgment, and act accordingly.

The foregoing remarks are made in reference to ordinary times. Cases have occurred, and may again occur, in which one may not wait for a formal expression of the sentiments of either the Church or the Ministers of Christ; but when a pious and humble man contemplates such a step, he feels the responsibility to be truly tremendous, if not terrific. It is true, that the Church and Ministers sometimes seem slow in calling and sending one into the sacred office. But in this age and country, there cannot be thought to exist much error of this kind. The great error seems to be of a directly opposite nature. Besides, were the delay ever so great, it may be that God has important ends in view; especially this, that one may have time to become better qua-

lified for the work. Such delay is sometimes seen to have been most benevolently and mercifully ordered by God. For instance, John Newton would have been utterly overwhelmed by the burden and number of his ministerial duties, had it not been for a wholesome, but at the time unwelcome, and, in its instrument, perhaps unkind delay of many months. Whenever judicious, pious, impartial people, with such concord as might fairly be expected, present the subject to one's mind, or when, their judgments being invited, they recommend farther serious consideration, their voice ought to be heard, so far at least as to secure mature and religious inquiry into the will of God. Especially does this principle obtain, when those possessing the power of ordination give their consent, or cordial approval. In reference to those who only wish to know, whether they ought to pursue a course of study and discipline preparatory to the work of the Ministry, let it be said, that even they may arrive at some degree of probability, as to what the views and wishes of the electing and ordaining powers will be, when the proper time shall have come.

Besides these expressions of the wishes and consent of men (over which God, in his providence, exercises sovereign control,) *there are various events*, which show more or less distinctly, the will of the Head of the Church. These leadings of providence are as various and as remarkable, as the striking diversity of occasions requires. In general, however, they relate to the things following, viz.

The disentangling of one from such engagements or

pursuits, as would interfere with the duties of a minister, or with due preparation for the holy office:

The furnishing of the means of acquiring the necessary knowledge, and discipline, by raising up liberal, and perhaps unexpected friends; by giving success in lawful business; or by disposing some one to instruct us in the rudiments of a suitable education:

Or if we already possess the means, perhaps God's will is indicated by defeating our worldly plans; by sending afflictions upon us; or by making us acquainted with the history, written or oral, of some one who has felt and acted very much like ourselves. In many ways, may God indicate his will by his providence. Now, acts of providence rightly interpreted, are of vast importance in directing the humble in all the affairs of life; and why should not their guidance be especially looked for in this great matter?

A few words of caution and warning belong to this subject. Because you cannot *see* your way clear from your present station to that of a minister, you may not infer that it is not clear, or will not *be* clear, as you proceed. It is not given to every man to see clearly far before him, though many think they do. "The pillar of cloud and of fire," a striking emblem of God's providence, gave not, on one day, any pledge as to the course to be pursued the next day. The question to be decided is this, "Can I lawfully take a step towards the holy Ministry?" If you can, and if it be God's will, that you should succeed, the way will, in due time, be opened for you to proceed further and further, until you shall find yourself

in that office, at which you had been grasping with pious eagerness for so long a time.

Again, judge nothing before the time. The acts of Divine Providence, until finished, are holy enigmas; and some of them remain such through our whole lives. If, therefore, God seem for a while to frown on your purposes, be not hasty in inferring that he is about to defeat your plans; but wait, and learn the end of the matter. And if he shall so hedge up your way, as that for a time you cannot proceed, wait and learn whether he will not open it again. When the hosts of Israel had the Red Sea before them and the Egyptians behind them, the unbelieving wished that they had remained in bondage, saying, they had only come out to "die in the wilderness." You must learn to "stand still," if you would "see the salvation of God." The obstructions of your way may only be intended as trials of your faith and patience.

To the foregoing evidences of a call must be added the *necessary qualifications, or the capacity, means, and desires of acquiring them*. That no man is called of God to perform a work for which he is not qualified, or cannot be qualified, before the time of performance arrives, is so plain a truth as to render proof almost unnecessary. Even fanatics admit the principle, but elude its force, by pleading their extraordinary, and supernatural endowments. God would not allow a man even to "make the tabernacle, the ark of the testimony, the mercy-seat, and the furniture of the tabernacle," until He had "called him, and filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom,

and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship." *Ex.* xxxi. 2—7. Certainly then God calls no man to labour in the very delicate, yet grand concerns of salvation, until, in some good degree, "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD." *Isa.* xi. 2, 3. It is true that these words have their fulfilment in Christ, but the spirit of them is applicable, in an important sense, to Christ's ministers. In other words, God requires no man to "divide his word," until he can do it "rightly;" although He may *call him to prepare to do it*. This was the call of the four fishermen, mentioned in the text: "Follow me, and I *will make* you fishers of men," said Jesus to two of them. The history of the other two shows their call to have been similar. Accordingly, they did not commence preaching immediately, but first learned from him, "who spake as never man spake."

As to what the qualifications for the Ministry are, let it be remembered that among them, *an experimental acquaintance with the truths to be taught*, justly holds great prominence. This subject of piety has already been spoken of as a *condecency* to the consideration of this subject. It is here introduced as a requisite to the verity of a call. This piety must be real, not feigned. "Wo unto you hypocrites," did Jesus often say. It must be practical and consistent. "Thou, which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man

should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" *Rom.* ii. 21, 22. The piety required must also be somewhat matured. A minister must be "not a novice (a young convert) lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." *1 Tim.* iii. 6. This piety must also be unimpeached by the world. "Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." *1 Tim.* iii. 7. Piety is indispensable to the saving of the soul of the preacher. Ministers must have that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord," or terribly perish. It is essential to the honour of Christ and his ordinances. If the "sons of Eli be sons of Belial," men will "abhor the offering of the Lord." It must be at the foundation of any long continued and *cheap* usefulness in the Church. The phrase "cheap usefulness," is not employed without design. For it is not impossible for a man without piety, and under the influence of ambition, or false zeal, to be useful to some extent; but it will be at a tremendous expense. In compassing some good, he will create a world of mischief. At least his good, which perhaps first appears, will be followed by a train of evils, that may not cease their operation on earth in a century. Indeed, men of some real piety may do this in many ways; and how much more, men without it!

Hence the *inestimable value of prudence as a qualification for the Ministry*. Should any say that pru-

dence is included under the last head, inasmuch as it is always, if genuine, the offspring of piety, the answer is, grant it, and still the great importance of the subject requires special notice. Besides, although the kind of prudence required may be the offspring of piety, yet it is no less the offspring of common sense. And, therefore, piety may consist with such constitutional or habitual imprudence, as unfits the subject of it for any important station in the Church of God, or in society. It would be impracticable, without destroying the symmetry of this Discourse, to do justice to the matter in hand. Reference is therefore made to a valuable discussion of this quality in Smith's work on the sacred office. A few things, however, may not be forgotten or neglected.

In the first place, then, the common consent of serious men is, that, as in a female, so in a minister, imprudence is not merely a foible, a slight obliquity, but it is a positive and glaring vice. Again, the Scriptures insist much upon it, not only under its proper name, but under the names of *wisdom* and *discretion*. "He that winneth souls is wise." *Prov.* ii. 30. He, who would win many souls, without criminally repelling as many, must be wise. Only "the words of the *wise* are as goads, and as nails fastened." *Eccles.* xii. 11. Some, perhaps, may say, "Will not carnal policy and human cunning be sufficient?" "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" *1 Cor.* i. 20. Jesus also said, "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore *wise* as serpents, and

harmless as doves." *Matt. x. 16.* It is proper to add, that if one doubt his call because of a defect in this point, let him by honest and fair trial learn whether his imprudence be incurable. If it can be cured and shall be cured, then his way will be as open before him as if he had not been indiscreet.

The subject next in order, is knowledge. This knowledge must be such as to shield one from the just charge of gross ignorance, or fatal error, or ludicrous mistake, and must respect the message to be communicated. Of course, no man can tell others what he does not know himself. How, or when, or where this knowledge is obtained, is not material. The possession of it is the important point. The knowledge required must be accurate, else it rather merits the name of conjecture. Neither does it consist merely in ideas and notions. These may become knowledge by frequent and deep reflection. This knowledge must also be scriptural. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." *Jer. xxiii. 28.* It must also be extensive. "Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." *Matt. xiii. 52.*

To this must be added, the *power of communicating knowledge in such a way as is suited to promote the great objects of preaching.* These are, the conviction, conversion, and edification of souls. The truth, that it may be effective, must be spoken audibly, boldly, affec-

tionately, earnestly, solemnly, with dignity and animation. So many valuable treatises have been published on this subject, as to make many remarks unnecessary. One remark may be sufficient; it is this: that such a manner of speaking as may become the stage, the bar, the hustings, or even the senate, will not suit the pulpit. Solemnity of a peculiar kind ought ever to rest on the sacred desk.

These four essentials, piety, prudence, knowledge, and the power of communicating knowledge in an appropriate manner, seem to include all that is requisite in the way of qualification. In speaking of them, brevity has been studied, because more than a brief notice would have been ill-timed. Much, however, is comprehended under each specification. These qualifications must be possessed before any man's credentials to the sacred office can be complete. From none of them can a dispensation be had. To ascertain these, is the object of the probation pointed out in Scripture. One, however, may not as yet have the necessary knowledge, or the gift of utterance in a sufficient degree, and still may lack nothing else. Let such honestly, humbly, and diligently endeavour the removal of such unfitness; and if he succeed, his call will be clear.

As the last of the evidences of a call, may be noticed a conviction of duty, based on the due consideration of matters already discussed. This conviction may not, need not be so strong as that a man will be able to employ in their entire import the words of Paul, when he says, "necessity is laid upon me; yea, wo is me, if I preach

not the Gospel." 1 *Cor.* ix. 16. Indeed, no man can use this language, as Paul used it, until he is *assured* of his call. Yet his conviction of duty may be as *real*, though not as *firm* as that of Paul. By a *real conviction of duty* in this matter, is meant something like this: that when a man does humbly, seriously, and candidly think of entering the Ministry, his mind does incline to the judgment, that in so doing, he would please God; and that in declining to do so, guilt would be contracted. This conviction, from its very nature and basis, grows or diminishes, according to the aspect of things as controlled by providence. Yet it must have permanency, though it may not be exceeding strong. If it be genuine, it will prove itself such by the fact, that it is strengthened by the desirableness, and weakened by the undesirableness, of our religious state and sentiments. It was this inward conviction that made the four men named in text, obey the call of Jesus. At the first, the strength of the conviction may be no greater than to justify one in saying: "So far as I now know my duty, I ought not to lose sight of the Ministry, as a work upon which I may enter at a future day." Indeed, this is, perhaps, as far as most can go, who are not yet prepared for ordination. A man may be in the ministry for many years, before he will be *fully convinced, beyond doubt*, that he is pleasing God. Yet no one may enter this holy office, whose convictions not only do not oppose, but also incline him to do so. Blessed is he, who, although possessed of a tender and enlightened conscience, doth not condemn himself for becoming a herald of salvation.

Rom. xiv. 22. Let us now seriously consider all that has been said, and say what could be left out without creating a flaw in the call. Might we omit an earnest desire for the work? What would one do in an office for which he had no ardent love? He would presently become a farmer, a merchant, a school-master, a physician, a politician, a lawyer, an owner of mills, a worldling. Could we dispense with a deep sense of personal unworthiness and insufficiency? "He that teaches humility must himself be humble." As to "trust in God," what is a minister without it? He is a reed shaken with the wind; a ship without an anchor; a world without a sun. Dare we leave out a high estimate of the dignity and incalculable importance of the office? "Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." *Isa.* v. 20. Let all things, especially sacred things, be rightly esteemed. Shall one commence preacher contrary to the wishes of the Church? How can he edify a people who will not hear him, or, if they do, wish him to be silent? Or shall one enter on the work, when those, who are at least *supposed* to be impartial and enlightened judges, tell him that they dare not "lay hands" on him, lest they should become "partakers of other men's sins?" *1 Tim.* iii. 22. Or, shall a man, forgetful or heedless of the voice of Providence, and the duties thereby created or designated, break through every obstacle, and rush into the Ministry, "as the horse rusheth into the battle?" "Faith, judgment, mercy, and piety at home," may, on

no account be omitted. Can piety be dispensed with? "To the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" *Ps.* i. 16. We dare not omit prudence. As "the wicked shall do wickedly," so the foolish will act foolishly, the imprudent, rashly. Nothing but a sound mind ever produced sound speech, that could not be gainsayed, or sober conduct that was irrebukeable. Knowledge is indispensable. "The priest's lips should keep knowledge." *Mal.* ii. 7. And knowledge, inappropriately communicated, will be useless to all, and injurious to many.

He, who runs against the convictions of his best judgment, cannot be strong in the day of trial; and must incur great guilt. *Rom.* xiv. 23. Let no man, then, attempt actually to enter the Ministry without all these evidences of a call. If he shall, he will certainly err. If any one doubt whether he possess the whole of them, and in such a degree as is necessary to render it safe for him to proceed, let him wait, humbly and patiently asking the guidance of Jehovah.

It is due to truth also to state, that the foregoing discussion is thought to include a summary of all that the Bible teaches respecting the nature and evidences of a call to the Ministry, as a general work. A call of God to labour in a particular sphere, as on a foreign mission, or on a domestic mission, or on an agency, or in a system of evangelism, or in the modest, perhaps retired, but delightful and holy work of pastor, or in the disciplining and instruction of candidates for the ministry, must be

determined by the addition of several distinct principles. But, so far as the subject of a scriptural call to the general work of the Ministry is concerned, what has been said is believed to embrace all the particulars specified in God's word.

From what has been said, the following seem to be natural and legitimate conclusions :

First : Two men may both be called of God to enter the Ministry at the same time ; and while one may be well satisfied of his own call, the other may have very painful apprehensions and fears, whether he ought to proceed. So that a man cannot know that he is not called, because he is not as certain about the course of his duty as some of his brethren are respecting the propriety of their course. Again, the clearness or doubtfulness in a man's mind about his own call, may arise either from the high or the low character of his piety. Nothing, therefore, positively encouraging or discouraging respecting the amount of personal piety, can be learned from the fact that our minds are doubtful, or that they are decided. How important, then, frequently and impartially to inquire into the state of piety in the soul !

It also follows, from what has been said, that a call may be regarded as clear or doubtful by the subject of it, while other persons may arrive at conclusions very diverse. Through the operation of many undesirable influences, a man may think himself clearly called to a work, from which impartial, and even charitable men will feel bound to restrain him. On the other hand, one, of whose call others may be satisfied, may, by the undue in-

fluence of some principles, in themselves good, but in this case misapplied, not think himself called to this great work. To this latter class scriptural encouragement should be given. God has set us the example.

Another obvious remark is, that one, who is called to commence preparation for the Ministry, ordinarily has a less amount of evidence in favour of his course at that time, than he has afterwards. In other words, he, who is but acquiring the rudiments of a suitable education, has less of certainty than the approved candidate for licensure; the licentiate has less than the candidate for ordination; the young minister less than the father in the Church. But then the first steps are always if not less important, less decisive, accompanied with lighter responsibilities, and, if unsuccessful, followed with less disastrous consequences than the subsequent steps. A moderate degree of probability may be the highest result of all the evidence before one's mind, until he shall resolve to make the effort, and, in making it, learn whether he ought to desist or proceed. This remark is intended for such, as having yet before them a large part of the work of preparation, are, nevertheless, demanding a weight of evidence in favour of a call to *prepare*, equal to that which might be expected, if they were about to be *inducted into office*.

A few observations on two things, necessary to be solemnly considered, shall close this Discourse. The first will concern the *resistance of a call*. That such resistance may be offered, few will doubt. If a pious man may enter the Ministry uncalled, as certainly some have done

confessedly, no reason can be given why even a pious man may not resist when called. This may be done by matrimonial entanglements, which date their existence either before or after the receiving of the call:

Or money-hunting, the spirit of accumulation, the supposed obligation, or the wicked purpose, of maintaining or augmenting hereditaments and patrimonies, may occasion the sinful resistance:

Sinful timidity, creating a wish to lead a quiet and retired life, and indisposing to any public appearance, may produce the same result:

Slothfulness, which loves ease, and dislikes activity, may occasion a refusal to "bear the heat and burden" of a minister's life:

Ambition for political, scientific, literary, or military fame, may keep one from obeying "the heavenly calling:"

A wicked pride, which is unwilling to be in the Ministry without pre-eminence, united with comparative and "conscious poverty of soul," and weakness of mind, may hinder men from doing their duty:

A "voluntary humility," which makes its subject deny the graces, or the gifts which God has bestowed upon him, has, probably, led many astray:

Or, one who is called, may satisfy himself for not obeying, by pleading the want of good health, when his health is confessedly sufficient for other employments equally *sedentary*, or *laborious*, or *active*:

Men, who advise not in the fear of God, especially relatives, perhaps parents, often persuade to sin, in resisting a call:

Sometimes men err through an *unfounded* supposition that their services are necessary for the maintenance of one or more dependants, who might otherwise be provided for, if proper efforts were made:

A foolish, and sinful unwillingness to receive aid from the Church, while preparing for the ministry, sometimes misleads:

Concealment of personal views and wishes in reference to the Ministry from those who might be helpers, may betray into sin:

Or, finally, a man may resist a call through inattention to the providence of God. If every cause or occasion of resistance has not been named, yet, enough has been said, to enable each one to supply the deficiency, if personal. The criminality, of course, varies according to the endless diversity of cases; but every resistance is criminal and perilous. If you would know how God regards the matter, read that awful dialogue between God and Moses about leading Israel to Canaan. God told Moses that he should be leader. Moses states, and God sets aside difficulty after difficulty. Moses still continuing to object, at last it is said, "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses." *Ex. iv. 14.* If God were thus displeased with Moses, to whom "he spoke as a man to his friend," can He be otherwise than highly displeased with all, who excuse themselves from the work to which they are called? "Wo unto him that striveth with his Maker!" *Isa. xlv. 9.* REMEMBER JONAH. Suppose that Jeremiah, after all the assurances of strength, and courage, and support which he received,

had persisted in crying: "Ah, Lord God! I cannot speak, for I am a child," God would have been angry with him. Or, suppose the four men mentioned in the text had resisted their call, they had, certainly, never been the instruments of such achievements as sacred story ascribes to them, nor filled the thrones in glory which they now occupy; nor had their names inscribed where John saw them. "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." *Rev.* xxi. 14. If Christ call you even to *prepare* for the Ministry, do you, like the four fishermen, "straightway, immediately follow." Blessed is he who, being called, obeys, humbly, heartily, joyfully running at God's command and fulfilling the ministry, which he receives. "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ." *2 Cor.* ii. 15. "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars forever and ever." *Dan.* xii. 3.

The concluding thoughts respect entering the Ministry, when God does not call. A man may do this in obedience to dreams, supposed voices, and indefinable impulses, thought to be indicative of God's will:

Or the various kinds of false zeal may first destroy modesty and sobriety, and then drive their subject into the Ministry:

Some may run uncalled through the influence of an erroneous opinion that every pious man may, if he can, and can, if he will, become "a preacher of righteousness." The truth is, pious men are so much needed

in every station in life, that the bare necessity of one to fill a place is no evidence of a designation of the person who ought to fill it. Else, every pious man must consider himself called to fill every variety of station :

A man may enter the Ministry uncalled, through a desire to lead an easy life, most erroneously thinking a *faithful* minister's such, or, most sadly forgetting that the only epitaph suitable to an *unfaithful* minister is, "It had been good for this man, if he had never been born."

Or covetousness, "that vile idolatry," may induce him to seek the Ministry. It is not true, that the American churches have nothing to fear from the operation of this principle on the Ministry, and on candidates for the Ministry :

Again, weak, partial, vain friends, especially parents, may give foolish advice, and cause one to sin, by going unsent :

A man also may be determined for the Ministry, by a conscious incapacity for any other learned profession, and by a low opinion of the dignity, and difficulty of this, and thus "play the fool:"

It sometimes occurs, that men under conviction, and in great distress, vow that if God will forgive their sins, and cheer their hearts, they will become preachers. When they hope that they have passed from death unto life, they remember their engagement, and keep it, forgetting that, in many cases, both God and their vow "would be more honoured by the breach than by the observance."

One may easily be moved by his blind irreverence for the sacredness of the office:

Or an unholy ambition to possess that kind of popularity, and confidence, which faithful ministers generally have, may be the ruling passion in seeking the Ministry:

Lastly: A man may enter the Ministry, uncalled, by taking imperfect views of the subject of a call, or by denying, or forgetting the whole matter of a scriptural call, and examining the question, "Ought I to enter the Ministry?" on general grounds, from which no correct decision can be made. Thus do those err who simply inquire, "Can I be more useful in the Ministry, than elsewhere?" a question which no man on earth can answer, unless he can first tell whether he is called of God.

Perhaps the foregoing specifications may be sufficient for ordinary purposes. Illustrations of some of them have perhaps afflicted most of the present race of pious men. There are some very strange, and almost unaccountable phenomena in this part of the religious world. Some *very weak* men have seemed to think that they were raised up in these latter days, to "turn the world upside down." Obtuseness of feeling makes them defy ridicule; and want of becoming moral sentiment enables them to live without pain in the midst of moral ruin. By whatever influence one is unscripturally brought into the Ministry, guilt rests upon him. In some cases the guilt is less than in others; but, in no instance, is the criminality small. One, who is in danger of thus transgressing, ought carefully to read, and solemnly to reflect

upon the following brief, but alarming narrative: "And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." 2 Sam. vi. 6, 7. That a man, by entering the Ministry, uncalled, may render himself ridiculous, or odious, is not so overwhelming a matter, until we remember that the honour of Christ, the dignity of the Gospel institute, and the salvation of souls are involved in his office. Under the ministry of such a man, the lambs and the sheep are not fed. Believers "grow not up as calves of the stall." Perhaps the spirit of daring speculation, or wild fanaticism reigns in terror. Or the "spirit of slumber" works ruin, not the less certain or total, because wrought in the undisturbed stillness of spiritual death. If piety be lacking, such a man will be "sowing the wind to reap the whirlwind." As to God, he will be an "empty vine, and bring forth fruit only unto himself." If he handle the sword of the Spirit without the skill, which none but the *truly called* have, he will wound whom God has not wounded, and defend whom God has not defended; and thus contract the guilt of a murderer of souls. And "a man," says Brooks, "had better have all the blood of all men in all ages of the world to answer for, than the blood of one single soul." "No man taketh this honour to himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron." Heb. v. 4.