

The Closet and the Church

by

Thomas Binney

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BY THE

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THE CLOSET AND THE CHURCH

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**THE
CLOSET AND THE CHURCH.**

A BOOK FOR MINISTERS.

BY T. BINNEY.

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TO

**THE RISING MINISTRY,
MORE ESPECIALLY OF THE**

**CONGREGATIONAL DENOMINATION,
THIS BOOK OF**

**The Closet and the Church,
IS
AFFECTIONATELY SUBSCRIBED
BY
THEIR FRIEND AND BROTHER,
THE AUTHOR.**

PREFACE.

THE following discourse was delivered at the Autumnal Meeting of "The Congregational Union of England and Wales," held at Leeds, in the year 1845. Its publication was very urgently called for by the Assembly at the time; but various reasons prevented acquiescence in the request. Some of these reasons still remain in almost all their force. This is especially the case with those which arise from the nature of the subject, and my mode of treating it. The theme is of such a sort, and the argument is so conducted, as to make the piece more fit, as it seems to me, for the minister's private ear, than for the curious gaze of the common eye. The character of the composition, too, is a ground of repugnance to publication. It is of that rough, rude order,—that artificial and somewhat exaggerated sort of utterance, which *I designedly adopt* when writing what is to be read to a mixed multitude; very

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different, therefore, from that quiet and subdued style which anyone would choose, and which, indeed, would naturally present itself, as the vehicle of reflections on a devotional subject, if written only for perusal in the closet. Certain circumstances, however, have recently led the author to get over these difficulties, springing from conviction, feeling and taste, and to permit the appearance of the discourse. His obstacles could only have been removed by his writing a new and different book,—one, more elaborately complete in its parts and structure, and free from those

strong lines, large proportions and glaring colours, which such pictures and representations require as are rapidly passed before a popular assembly. Such a book, however, it is quite out of my power to write at present; nor do I know that it would secure the ends sought by this, better than itself. I have reason to believe that, as it is, the present publication will not be unacceptable to some of my brethren, and have ground therefore to hope that it may not fall to the ground without fruit. I am quite willing to risk other things, for the sake of securing this latter result.

I earnestly pray, and I humbly solicit every devout reader to join me in my request, that the Great Head of the Church may graciously con-

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descend to bless this small effort, and to shed down abundantly, on ministers in general, and “on all congregations committed to their care,” “the healthful Spirit” “of grace and of supplication,”—a blessing which would be at once the source and the symptom of “a revived ministry,” and an “earnest church!”

There are two things which rather contribute to my satisfaction in sending forth this book. The *first* is, that, though it will not be, in all respects, a substitute for one which many of my indulgent friends and readers expected about this time.—(and which I had hoped to have produced, but that during the greater part of the year I have been quite incapacitated for writing, and have had often to remit my regular public duties,)—yet by some it will be received in the character indicated. As these will mostly be my brethren in office,—from whom I have recently received great kindness, in connection with the discharge

of an important public function, and to whom, especially the younger of them, I very affectionately inscribe this Discourse,—any good that it may do may really be more extensive and lasting, in its ultimate consequences, than if it had addressed itself to a greater number of readers. The *second* is, that with a discourse

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entitled “THE ULTIMATE DESIGN OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY—to *present every man perfect in Christ Jesus,*” and with “THE SERVICE OF SONG *in the House of the Lord,*” this piece, “THE CLOSET AND THE CHURCH,” referring to ministerial devotion, will, together, have a sort of completeness,—uttering, respectively, some few thoughts on Preaching, Prayer, and Praise; and though they will by no means be what a book deliberately composed *all at once* on these subjects, *in all their bearings,* would have been, they will yet form a volume, that may suggest some useful hints, or communicate some quickening or guiding impulse to the minds of students and young ministers, if not to general readers and elder men. Editions of the other two pieces, just mentioned, are intended to appear immediately. They will be uniform, as to size, with this; and may be bound together, if the purchaser so wills.

I know not that I could better conclude these few prefatory remarks, than by the following passage, which I find in the works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, vol. iv. p. 316. It occurs in a sermon occasioned by the death of the Rev. J. Sutcliffe, of Olney, founded on Jude, 20, 21. “Building yourselves up in the love of God. *praying in the Holy Ghost, &c.*” It is worthy

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of notice as the combined testimony of two eminent men and “good ministers of Jesus Christ,” to the great subject so imperfectly handled in the following pages. The author is happy in being able to introduce and to fortify his own reflections, by what comes as the expression at once of matured wisdom, rich experience, and dying regret.

“That religion which has its foundation in the faith of Christ will increase by ‘*praying in the Holy Spirit.*’ As there is no true practical religion without faith in Christ, so there is no true prayer but ‘in the Holy Spirit.’ It is true ‘that men *ought* always to pray, and not to faint;’ but it is no less true that we know not what to pray for *as we ought*, but as the Spirit helpeth our infirmities: clear proof this, by the way, that that may be man’s duty which yet, owing to his depravity, cannot be performed but by divine grace; and that the Holy Spirit works that in us which God as the governor of the world requires of us; writing his law upon our hearts, or working in us that which is pleasing in his sight.

“The assistance of the Holy Spirit, however, is not that of which we are always sensible. We must not live in the neglect of prayer at any time because we are unconscious of being under divine

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influence, but rather, as our Lord directs, pray *for* his Holy Spirit. It is *in* prayer that the Spirit of God ordinarily assists us. Prayers begun in dejection have often ended in joy and praise: of this, many of the Psalms of David furnish us with examples,

“One of the sentences uttered by your deceased pastor, when drawing near his end, was, ‘I WISH I HAD PRAYED MORE.’ This was one of those weighty sayings which are not unfrequently uttered in view of the solemn realities of eternity. This wish has often recurred to me since his departure, as equally applicable to myself, and with it the resolution of that holy man, President Edwards, ‘so to live as he would wish he had when he came to die.’ In reviewing my own life, *I wish I had prayed more than I have for the success of the gospel.* I have seen enough to furnish me with matter of thankfulness, but, had I prayed more, I might have seen more. I wish I had prayed more than I have *for the salvation of those about me, and who are given me in charge.* When the father of the lunatic doubted whether Jesus could do anything for him. he was told in answer that, if he could believe, all things were possible. On hearing this he burst into tears, saying, ‘Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!’ He seems

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to have understood our Lord as suggesting that, if the child was not healed, it would not be owing to any want of power in him, but to his own unbelief. This might well cause him to weep and exclaim as he did. The thought of his unbelief causing the death of his child was distressing. The same thought has occurred to me as applicable to the neglect of the prayer of faith. Have I not by this guilty negligence been accessory to the destruction of some that are dear. to me? And, were I equally concerned for the souls of my connexions as he was for the life of his child, should I not weep with him? I wish I had prayed more than I have *for my own soul:*

I might then have enjoyed much more communion with God. The gospel affords the same ground for spiritual enjoyment as it did to the first Christians. I wish I had prayed more than I have *in all my undertakings*: I might then have had my steps more directed by God, and attended with fewer deviations from his will. There is no intercourse with God without prayer. It is thus that we walk with God, and have our conversation in heaven.”

It remains only to be stated, that, last year, when I had no idea or intention of ever publishing

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this discourse, I transferred about a dozen or eighteen lines of it into my pamphlet on “Education,” as they happened to be suited to my purpose and were not expected to appear anywhere else. It would be impossible to omit them in the argument for which they were originally written, and hence they will be found, though with some difference of application, in both books.

T. B.

Walworth.

THE CLOSET AND THE CHURCH.

WE are passing, and have long been passing, through exciting times,—times of agitation and controversy. At such periods, it is usual with every church, on occasions like the present, to discuss some subject of public interest or denominational importance;—to expose the errors of other bodies from whom it separates, or who separate from *it*, and to defend its own doctrine and discipline. I do not see that this is either unnatural or unbecoming. The alarm of some good people at the idea of controversy and the occasional introduction of controversial topics into public discourse, is very childish. Christianity was born and cradled in controversy—by controversy it was propagated and preserved. Some of Paul's Epistles, if published now, would be regarded as so many controversial pamphlets.

The Apostle had to fight with his speech and pen, like any Reformer or Dissenter at present; arid, as things then were, he was both. In fact, until error be extirpated and truth, universal, Christians, and Christian churches and bodies, must regard it as their imperative obligation and duty “to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints;” and it is this,—and that which is its best preservative and home,—for which, of course, all imagine that they *do* contend. While fully admitting, however, the truth of these remarks, I confess I begin to get somewhat

tired of mere controversy and controversial discussion, and I intend to avoid it entirely to-night. I purpose, by God's help, instead of attacking the faults of other systems, or showing how good and excellent our own is, to try, with fraternal faithfulness and affection, to say something that may make you and me better men. When I received the invitation of the Union to occupy this place, and that unaccompanied by any request or specification of subject, I felt that I should incur great responsibility, not merely by undertaking the service, but by having to determine the subject for myself. Those responsibilities, however, I did incur: and I am here to meet them, to the best of my judgment, and the extent of my ability.

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A church, or by whatever name any great Christian body may be called, is nothing without religion,—deep, earnest, spiritual religion. Destitute of this, it is an embodied falsehood—an imposition and a pretence. In any church, there will not be much religion, if there be little or none in the ministry; and there will not be much there, if ministers are not careful to walk, in private, very closely with God; so that their piety shall not be merely official,—which of course is no piety at all. On all occasion like this, ministers attend in large numbers, both of our own and other communions; and in this locality, many can be present of those who are preparing for the sacred office; it is not often that such an opportunity occurs, for a subject to be taken, with fitness and propriety, which shall address itself to the *ministry*, rather than to the people. Such an one I am about to introduce. Speaking, as I do, not so much in my own person, as in that of

the organ of a public body, the imputation of presumption may be fairly met by that circumstance. Trusting that I shall neither incur that imputation, nor advance anything offensive to the Body I have the responsibility to represent, I proceed to request the attention of my brethren, in particular, to a subject, which, to us in the

ministry, is second to none in solemnity and importance,—a subject, which, though often incidentally adverted to at ordinations and settlements, I do not remember to have seen treated, fully and alone, as the exclusive topic of an entire discourse. I refer to the subject of *private prayer by those who sustain the sacred function*,—in other words, the importance of ministerial devotion, from the connection between *it* and ministerial success. The passage of Scripture selected as a text, is couched in language that makes it terrible. God forbid that I should think of applying it as truly descriptive, either to our own, or to the ministry of any church whatsoever. I merely select it, as something on which I may found and by which I may regulate my remarks. It occurs in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, chap. x., v. 21:—

“THE PASTORS ARE BECOME BRUTISH, AND HAVE NOT SOUGHT THE LORD;—THEREFORE, THEY SHALL NOT PROSPER, AND ALL THEIR FLOCKS SHALL BE SCATTERED.”

“Three things,” said Luther, “make a minister—study, affliction, and prayer.”

The first is necessary to furnish the head with competent knowledge; the second,

to instruct the teacher in the learning of the heart; and the third, because without it both the others would not only be very imperfectly acquired, but, even if it were possible for it to be otherwise, they would still, in a very great measure, be acquired in vain. Elliott, the apostle of the Indians, who mastered a language composed of, or containing words which, to look at them, it would seem hardly "possible for man to utter," with a pardonable consciousness of having accomplished something extraordinary, placed as a motto over his study-door, "painstaking and prayer can achieve anything." In all labour, or "painstaking," there is profit. Without toil, nothing great, nothing illustrious was ever done. This is true, of what is attempted by missionaries and ministers,—true, of the results of religious enterprise and the efforts of sanctified ability,

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as well as of other things: but, in these latter cases, there is another element to be taken into account;—here, emphatically, *without God* nothing can be great, nothing wise, nothing successful:—from Him, all holy counsels and just thoughts proceed;—and *to Him*, it is necessary for his servants to be continually looking, by the exercise of internal faith, and the utterance of vocal prayer.

In commencing our remarks upon this subject, it may be necessary to observe, that we shall, of course, put out of sight

the particular application of the text to the Jewish people, and confine ourselves to the bearing of its phraseology on our own times and circumstances. The pastors, primarily intended by Jeremiah, were not only the priests and ministers of religion, but the kings and political authorities of the nation. The whole of the ruling and teaching classes are referred to;—the secular protectors, as well as the *sacred* guides of the dock. And,

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certainly, for monarchs and nobles to be represented by imagery taken from the pastoral life, and to be regarded as the shepherds of the community over which they preside, is an idea at once simple, beautiful and instructive: it might not be without its use, in teaching the illustrious and dignified, (if they would consider it,) that even hereditary station has its imperative duties as well as its rights, and that the first must be attended to if the second are to be respected. The masses of mankind, politically speaking, need solicitous and loving guidance. The greater part, I believe, *know* that they need it, and are *willing to be led*. Naturally, I am persuaded, nations are far more disposed to obey than to rebel; and would readily follow, and loyally serve, any that went before them like true “shepherds,” showing that they watched and cared for them as “a flock.” The honours of such never would be envied; their possessions coveted;

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or their authority despised. The tendency of society is to bear much—*very* much, before it either complains or resists. The majority of men wish to be quiet,—to pursue their daily toil, and to partake their domestic satisfactions,—and would seldom be capable of being taught to murmur, or tempted to revolt, if their rulers were habitually and manifestly influenced by the sentiments suggested by the image of the text. All this, however, we pass by; and all that might be said about the *kind* of relationship between the *religious* pastors—the priests and levites of the ancient church—and the tribes, or flocks, committed to their care. With the word “pastors,” we associate the New Testament idea of spiritual teachers or guides;—and with the word “flocks,” the congregations or churches, which, by them, are to be preserved and nourished, instructed and led.

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II.

Perhaps the best mode of presenting our argument with clearness and force, will be to begin, by supposing, in a Christian church, or churches, the fulfilment of the prophet’s denunciation. Imagine, then, a number of men, the religions and spiritual guides of others, of whom it may be said, in the language of an apostle, that “their souls” do *not* “prosper;” who, if not entirely without religion, are without its power, life, and enjoyment; whose faith is

destitute of activity and strength; who have lost their relish for spiritual subjects, as matters of frequent and voluntary thought;—who are without earnestness and depth of character; without seriousness, though never flagrantly violating professional decorum;—men, who have ceased to feel at home in divine studies—who engage in them as an exercise of learning or intellect,

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or as the indispensable preparation for what must be done; who are never visited with gushes of light irradiating the Word, nor filled with emotions of solemn rapture from the vivid impression and enjoyment of its truths; who, spiritually speaking, are habitually cold, dark, indolent; who, when tempted to such sins as a minister may commit without positive disgrace, resist weakly, or yield at once; who feel reluctant to reprove sin, from conscious inconsistency or false shame; who are struck dumb, or are heartlessly voluble, when suddenly required to meet the case of an awakened conscience, or to speak a word in season to an afflicted saint. In short, combine all you can imagine as constituting the symptoms of diseased and enfeebled spiritual life;—principles, sentiments, affections weak, fluctuating, fading away, ready to die;—and all this in ministers of religion and pastors of flocks;—men, who in spite of it all, are constantly compelled,

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from their office and obligations, to be thinking of—and talking about—and touching, and handling the things of God!

Prosperity in a “pastor,” however, it is further to be remarked, extends beyond what is merely *personal*. Without referring to the “scattering” of the flock, (the second idea included in the text, and which it will become us immediately to notice)—without referring to this, the want of prosperity in the case before us may certainly include, not only *the decline* of a minister’s personal religion, but the absence of real, spiritual success; the absence of that effective usefulness, which consists in the healthy growth of religion among a people,—the decision and steadfastness of the young,—and the conversion of others from the errors of their way. Let it be supposed, that there is nothing yet like the darker shade of the picture of the prophet—the “scattering” he speaks of; that the flock, on the whole, in the individuals that com-

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pose it, in their number and external religious appearance, is very much the same as it ever was; still, there may be the absence, perceptible and felt by observant men, of unction and power in the teaching of the pulpit, and of fervour and glow in the worship of the people. Things, somehow or other, are not right. The flock does not seem likely to perpetuate itself from the trained piety of its own off-

spring; nor has it the prospect of adequate accessions from the preaching of the gospel properly so called. No instrumentality that used to be in action, has ceased to be employed; but the showers of blessing seem to be withheld. There is dearth,—drought; a want, to the eye, of verdure and beauty—to the taste, of satisfaction and sweetness, in what ought to be, and what once were, the green pastures and the still waters, in, or by the side of which, the happy flock was wont to feed! These things, and such as these, in addition to

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all that is *personal* to himself, are suggested by the words “he shall not prosper,” when applied to a “pastor.” They may often exist, to a considerable extent, and yet not be universally perceived. Indeed, this aspect of the general subject is one to be *felt* rather than explained; one, which it requires the practised eye and the quick instincts of the spiritual man, to detect in fact, or to understand by description.

Advancing, however, to the next point, we must dwell for a moment on the “*scattering*” of the flock. These words carry us farther than to the mere thought of its *not being increased*—the negative form of the want of prosperity. They bring, to this, the positive idea of dissolution—dispersion—scattering abroad. A strong illustration of this would be furnished, by supposing some place, formerly crowded with Christian worshippers, to cease to be frequented ex-

cept by a few; the edifice to have become but a gloomy memorial of what once was;

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the ways of Zion, in this instance, to be almost silent and nearly forsaken—her throngs diminished, and her glory gone. But it is not necessary to take this extreme view of the case. A flock may be scattered, spiritually speaking, though it continue to exist—and continue to meet in the same fold, and appear to observers as one body. The members may be estranged from each other in their affections; strife and division may exist among them; misunderstandings unattempted to be settled, feuds and jealousies not to be appeased. Or, free from the weeds and waters of bitterness, there may still be wanting the binding power of sympathy and love. A people may meet in the same place, but without cordial, consolidated union, because without the spirit of enterprise and zeal bringing them together in associated effort. In such a case, some will be occasionally dropping off, and falling away,—finding their home in secular circles, and losing their religion by secular con-

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formity. Or, instead of these views of the scattering of the flock, the subject may be placed in another and different light altogether. A flock may be “scattered,”—*not* by its dispersion leaving the fold empty and desolate;—not by its division in to parties and factions;—not by the decay and failure of piety, terminating in the worldly apostacy of its members;—but it may be “scattered,”

by the truly devout and spiritual—the best and holiest of the body—taking their reluctant and sorrowful departure; going with regret, but still going:—leaving, however, their places to others, and not being missed, *so far as numbers are concerned*. To the outward eye there may be no appearance of diminution or decay; much otherwise—there shall at first sight be the apparent symptoms of life, health, prosperity, success: and yet, with all this, the flock may be scattered though the fold is full—filled to overflowing—for it may be filled *with anything but sheep!* A shepherd, surrounded

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by a crowd of pernicious or useless animals, not through the attraction of some divine secret, by which he changes their nature—expelling their ferocity and reducing them to a subjection useful to man—but, because the food he professedly provides for the flock is mixed with what such creatures can relish and like, in their natural state and with their natural appetencies—at the same time that the sheep themselves are actually “scattered” hither and thither in search of pasture:—*this* would not be a more unnatural and melancholy spectacle to the eye of man, than, perhaps, many supposed Christian congregations present to the eye of angels and of God.

III.

Having thus attempted to realize the fulfilment, in the Christian church, of the prophet's denunciation, we proceed, in the

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next place, to notice *that sin* to which he attributes such a lamentable state of things. The evil complained of will be seen in its proper aspect and magnitude, if, before we mention it, we enumerate some other things to which, in the present case, we are *not* to refer the ruin we have contemplated.—It is not, then, to be ascribed to any informality in the admission of the minister to the sacred office. However little, or however much, this may be dreaded in some parts of the church, as the source of evils, it is not to be thought of, at the present time, as the cause or occasion of evil at all. The “pastors” of the prophet, whether kings or priests, were regularly descended from David or Aaron, and had, respectively, been crowned or consecrated with every regard to the customary formalities; and so, the pastors of whom, we have been speaking, are not to be supposed to have had their services invalidated by the infringement of any order—the absence or neglect of any circumstances

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required by the churches to which they belong. Whatever their denomination, they are to be supposed to have “entered by their respective doors into the sheep-fold,” and not to have “climbed up over the wall,” or to have forced admission in any other way. Nor, again, is it to be supposed that they are destitute either of natural gifts or acquired, ability. Their powers may be great, vigorous and varied. These powers

may have been duly trained by academical discipline, enriched by science, purified by taste, brought into contact with all knowledge, and then concentrated on subjects of sacred lore. The men may be distinguished by lofty thought, logical acuteness, ready utterance, force of words; with minds as fertile in the lights and illustrations which the imagination supplies, as opulent in the materials of instructive discourse. Farther: it is not to be supposed that their manner in worship is careless or irreverent; or their instructions crude, vapid, repulsive, or des-

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titute of laborious intellectual preparation: it may even be imagined that they strictly adhere to the gravity and decorum of sacred things, and never advance what has not been somewhat carefully reviewed. It is not to be supposed that they deny the truth, and inculcate dangerous and deadly error. Their customary topics may be *substantially* evangelical, or at least consistent with the verities of Scripture. It need not even be supposed that they are wanting in fervour, variety or impressiveness. They may have much of the artillery of eloquence at their command;—may be “sons of thunder,” striking to the depths of the conscience and the heart; or they may speak in the “still small voice,” with the words of love and the accents of tenderness, so that their speech “shall drop like the rain, and distil as the dew.” Nor, lastly, are they to be conceived as chargeable

with any gross immorality of behaviour.
Their lives are not to be supposed vicious,

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nor their consciences burdened with great guilt;—their characters are free from the suspicion of any flagrant impropriety, and their conduct, on the whole, in all outward and visible things, equal to the demands of society respecting them.—In spite, however, of all that we have enumerated;—in spite of personal ability, official order, pulpit accomplishments, grave and decorous *public* devotion, force of utterance, animated feeling, scriptural topics, moral worth;—in spite of these and of other excellencies, there is one evil in the habits of these men, which, hidden as it is from the human eye, is real and deadly, and eats “as doth a canker” into all they utter and all they do.—*They* “do not prosper,” and their flocks are “scattered,”—for they have become “brutish,” and “*have not sought the Lord.*”

This, then, is the defect that poisons everything;—they are not men of *frequent, earnest, private devotion.* They have great

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abilities,—*but they do not pray.* They are ministers of Christ, according to outward order,—*but they do not pray.* They are good, and, perhaps, even great preachers, —*but they do not pray.* They are fervent, pungent, persuasive, convincing,—*but they do not pray.* They may be zealous and enterprising,—leaders in the movements of public activity,—the first and foremost

in popular excitement,—frequent in their appeals,—abundant in their labours,—working zealously in various modes and in divers places,—but *they do not pray*. They are men of integrity, purity, benevolence,—but *they do not pray*.—And THIS ONE THING—their “restraining prayer,”—their not “calling upon God,”—their not “seeking after” nor “stirring up themselves to take hold of” Him,—this, like the want of love in the Christian character, “stains the glory” of everything else;—it renders worthless their genius, talents, and acquisitions; obstructs their own spiritual

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prosperity; impedes their usefulness and blasts their success. Though a minister were an apostle, *and did not pray*, his “speech and his preaching” would *not* be “with the demonstration of the spirit and of power.” “Though he had the gift of prophecy, and understood all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though he had faith that could remove mountains,”—*and did not pray*, “he would be nothing.” “Though he gave all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burnt,”—*and did not pray*, “it would profit him nothing.” “Though he spake with the tongues of men and of angels,”—*and did not pray*, he would be but “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” He might be “like unto one that hath a pleasant voice, and a lovely song, and that plays well upon an instrument;” but the music

of the lip and the hand only, will never charm away the evil spirit from Saul; nor can it have in it that divine and life-giving

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harmony which “of stones can raise up children unto Abraham.”

IV.

We are thus brought to inquire, in the next place, How it is that this neglect of prayer, in a minister, operates so injuriously on both himself and the flock?

1st.—It may be observed, in the first place, in relation to the pastor’s own spiritual prosperity, that he is not only a minister but a Christian;—that the Christian life in him must be nourished and sustained in the same manner as in other men;—and that this is especially to be secured by prayer. A minister cannot live on his own official acts—his public prayers, his public preaching, his meditations on the Scriptures preparatory to that—the impressions of truth and the gushes of emotion which he may obtain or enjoy in the discharge of his

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duties. These are not the things by which alone, or even principally, his personal religion can be upheld or grow. If confined to these, and dependent upon them, it will languish and die, He must enter his closet, and shut the door, and be with his Father in secret, frequently and long; reading the Scriptures without thought of the people

or the pulpit,—praying for light, grace, strength,—seeking instruction and exercising faith, as if he was alone in the world with God. It is one of the most trying and difficult things, for one constantly required to conduct worship and to preach to others, to pray in private with simplicity and freshness, or to meditate on the Bible without the intrusion of distracting thought, meddling with the soul, by detecting in the portion of truth it should enjoy, texts for discourse and topics for discussion. But the spiritual life and prosperity of a minister depend, very much, on his being able to overcome this besetting temptation; and

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just, therefore, in proportion to the difficulty, is it requisite for him to make the attempt. If religious acts and religious feeling ever come to be exclusively or mostly official, the soul of the minister must of necessity be injured; for then, he not only neglects the direct and proper instrument of improvement, but he robs himself of the benefit, which, *when private intercourse with God is maintained*, public acts may be the means of conferring. Very frequent public engagements, however,—especially such as are of a more than ordinarily exciting nature,—I greatly fear are often prejudicial to ministerial piety. The human mind cannot bear, at least in common and ordinary men, to be always engaged on one subject, and always running in the same direction. If it be incessantly familiar with sacred exercises and Divine

themes in public service, it will assuredly be in danger of seeking relief, under the consequent exhaustion of the body and the

³⁸ fatigue and collapse of its own powers, by very inadequate private exercises, or perhaps by their frequent and criminal neglect. No man can habitually retire, to discharge with interest and contemplate with freshness the same duties and the same topics, which he has daily to discharge or to discuss in public till he learns to anticipate them with a repugnance that appals himself, or with the mere hardihood of official habit. Our Lord understood this danger in the case of his disciples; and hence; when they returned from a course Of preaching, his command was, after just waiting to hear their report, "Come ye, by yourselves apart, into a desert place and rest awhile." *Rest*, in seclusion and solitude with Christ, we may be well assured, would be attended with the refreshment resulting from prayer—the renewal, by calm individual devotion, of the spiritual energies exhausted by the excitement of public duty. And here it may be observed,

³⁹ that on the occasion referred to, the disciples had been remarkably successful in the exercise of their ministry and the expulsion of demons; they spoke of it with something like the glow of conquest, with vivid internal gratulation and delight. "*Lord, even the devils are subject to us, through thy name !*" The discerning eye of their Divine Master

perceived this; and perceived, too, the danger of its soon becoming the intoxication of vanity or the swelling of pride, and *therefore* he invited them to privacy and to prayer. We may learn from this, that not only the ordinary necessities of the Christian life render devotion incumbent on the minister, but, much more, the dangers and temptations incident to his office; especially if he be furnished with distinguished powers, adorned with brilliant gifts, or is favoured at first with eminent success. So firmly am I persuaded that ministers can no more live on their own public official acts, than "*man can live by bread alone,*"

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that, if there were such an arrangement of things among us, so would permit them very frequently to be worshippers—private worshippers and undistinguished disciples—and that, too, on the first day of the week, and in connection with the stated ordinances of the church—I am strongly of opinion that this would be of great advantage to their personal religion, and, by consequence, to that of the flock; for, it is to be remembered, that, of two ministers in all other respects equal, *he* will be the best—the most efficient, useful and owned—who is the best Christian. He who keeps his own vineyard, is, in the estimation of both God and man, the most worthy of trust and confidence as professing to keep the vineyard of others. The Apostle Paul frequently mentions his "*continual* prayers,"—his prayers "*night and day*" and there

can be no doubt, that his devotion and his preaching—his private exercises as a Christian with God, and his public appeals as an

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apostle to man—mutually acted and reacted on each other; his labours in THE CHURCH sending him constantly to prayer in THE CLOSET,—and *prayer in THE CLOSET* returning him to THE CHURCH, with fresh inclination and ability to labour.

2nd.—It may be observed, in the second place, in relation to spiritual impression and usefulness, that the personal, religious prosperity of a “Pastor” necessarily modifies every thing he does; and thus, by way of natural consequence, cannot but affect both the character and results of his public ministrations.

Spiritual truth, to be correctly apprehended and effectively taught, requires a certain condition of intellect and feeling, of which he, who is not himself “spiritually minded,” *must* be destitute. However, sometimes, strong impressions of the things of God, and deep convictions of the first and elementary principles of religion, may be made, as in a moment, on the thoughtless and the wicked, it is quite impossible to

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attain any high acquaintance with Divine truth, without the culture and the preservation of a state of mind in harmony with itself. To any two persons of equal ability and of equal learning, but of opposite moral habits and tastes, the Bible will appear an entirely different Book;—nay, it will appear thus different to two equally *bad*

men, just coming from the accomplishment of two different acts;—or to the same bad man at different times—as he returns flushed and heated from a debauch, or from some unwonted act of self-sacrifice, sympathy with suffering, or firm resistance to impurity and wrong. It is to the honour of the Book that it should be so. It is to eulogize the Gospel, to say that it bids its mysteries from the wise and prudent—the proud and the impure—and reveals them only to the docile and devout, To require a purified condition of the affections,—a moral state of the heart, distinguished by humility and seriousness,—by high principle,

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and deep and earnest longings after God,—to require this, as a necessary pre-requisite to the proper perception of religious truth. and as indispensable to a just religious judgment, is at once as consistent with philosophy as it is plainly and repeatedly the demand of the Scripture, In the same way, to assert that to teach religion, a man must be religious;—that to speak justly of spiritual truth, and to convey an accurate and adequate impression of it to others, requires a high and cultivated state of spirituality in the speaker;—*this* is to say nothing but what is felt to be true in relation to any and to every thing else on which man can discourse. It is not, for instance, the mere knowledge of science, of law or medicine, philosophy or art, that qualifies a person, to become an effective teacher in these departments;—it is feeling, enthu-

siasm,—a deep, earnest, absorbing interest in the particular branch which the individual professes. Nay, this is essential to the very

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acquisition and competency of his knowledge. The fire in the soul—the intensity of interest which animates and pervades it—this it is, that opens the eye to the beauties of poetry and the delicacies of art, or enables it to see, in the experiments of philosophy, what would utterly escape the less enthusiastic;—this it is, that suggests hypotheses, prompts to investigation, lightens labour;—that enables the man to illustrate the obscure and to discover the unknown;—and that causes ideas to be received into the memory as things that have life, beauty and splendour, as well as truth, and, when brought forth again in uttered discourse, that bids them to come with a vivacity, freshness, and force of impression, which they can never have but when acquired and reproduced by a mind and man, in taste and feeling as well as in intellect, in harmony with themselves.—The principle involved in these general statements applies with the strongest emphasis to religion. Here, a certain

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spiritual condition of the faculties is pre-emptorily required, both to the just apprehension of truth, and to its clear, full, and effective administration. We insist not, at present, on *Divine* influence—that shall have our attention afterwards—we refer, now, simply to the effect of the state of the mind on its own perceptions, independently

of higher aid,—and to the influence of the *spirit of man* on *man*—the minister's on the people—independently of the influence of the Spirit of God on either or on both. We deem this of great importance;—and we hold it to be nothing but the assertion of a law, which exists and acts in all other departments of knowledge, regulating the attainment, and affecting the teaching, of all sorts of truth whatsoever. On this law, we lay the position which we at present enforce,—that a minister's own, personal, religious state cannot but affect every thing he attempts and every thing he does. If his soul be neglected,—if prayer be restrained,—

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if he seek not seriously to cultivate in him:—self all that is divine, holy and Godlike,—if his heart and feeling be habitually out of harmony with the themes he handles,—the Book of God will not open to him its hidden treasures;—his perceptions of truth, however accurate, will want the warmth and colour that belong to them;—in putting them into speech, there will often be a felt though indescribable deficiency, that will rob them of their power to penetrate and subdue the souls of others. “The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant.” “In God's light we see light.” The lips of the prophet were touched and purified by a live coal from the Divine altar. It is by devotion,—earnest, sincere, habitual devotion,—that the prophets and pastors of the Christian Church can either “walk in the light” with

God, “beholding his beauty” as they inquire into his counsels;” or have their lips so cleansed, that they may speak “as they

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ought to speak,”—that their words may be “with power,”—impressing their hearers, as those of the Master were impressed when they said, “*this man speaks with authority and not as the scribes.*”

3rd.—The text suggests, that the spirit of devotion in a minister not only promotes a general habit of mind preparatory and suitable to the study of the word, and the teaching of Truth; but that it is further beneficial, by taking the especial and specific form of “*seeking the Lord.*”

We have no difficulty about the propriety of prayer, as a means of obtaining direct benefits, in addition to its reflex influence on the mind. We might have, were we dependent entirely on our own reasonings. It is not easy, perhaps, to prove to the understanding the consistency of the act with all the Divine perfections, nor its power and use in a world like ours, governed as it is upon fixed principles and by general laws. As Christians, however, we have really:

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nothing to do with this. We pray as a part of “the obedience of faith.” We believe that *he* has commanded it, who known his own nature and attributes better than we; and who thus tells us, that prayer itself is one of the laws under which we live and by which he acts. *Our* business is to obey;—to obey, believing the promise—expecting

the blessing—and leaving *to Him* whatever difficulties the subject may involve.—To “seek the Lord” therefore,—his guidance and help, and to expect *literally* to be helped and guided,—is, in a Christian, the most consistent and rational thing in the world: and ministers, who are engaged so directly in God’s work, need especially to supplicate God’s aid. We should live in the thorough belief that, in this way, we may obtain direction in the choice of subjects and the mode of treating and presenting them, as well as nourish and sustain a state of heart in harmony with our office.—It is to be remembered, too, that the success of the

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ministry is always attributed to the Master, not to the servant. “The power is His.” The demonstration that subdues the intellect is “the demonstration of the Spirit;”—the hand that “opens the heart,” is the band of God. We believe that in religious teaching there is a power required to accompany the instruction, and a state of feeling necessary for receiving it, which are not thus required and necessary in the teaching and learning of other things. The man of science can go through his demonstration and exhibit his experiments, and the thing is done;—*his* understanding is adequate to the one part, and his pupil’s to the other. But in morals it is not so;—certainly not in the conveyance and perception of *spiritual* truth;—*here*, a gracious, divine influence is requisite to success,—and the enjoyment of it, by those engaged in instruction, is sus-

pended, very much, on the faith with which it is trusted, and the importunity with which it is sought. The minister who most feels

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his need of it,—most sincerely believes in its reality—and most earnestly seeks it by prayer—will enjoy it most;—and, other things being equal, be most distinguished by spiritual success. “*Them that honour me, I will honour.*” To “seek the Lord,” in the manner we are explaining, is one of the modes by which “Pastors” may come into harmony with the principle, and obtain the substance, of this promise.—If a minister have not God’s aid in God’s work, he is left in a condition of appalling abandonment.—Acting and labouring *alone* in such a vocation! It is a sad sight;—a poor, solitary, unaided man, trying to do a divine thing in a state of sinful and melancholy independence!—In proportion to his personal communion with God, a minister may become the medium, so to speak, of Divine influence; but if he seek Him *not*, he may stand between Him and the people, not to convey but to obstruct—to hide the effulgence of Truth, and to hinder the progress

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of impression.—All this is perfectly reasonable and natural; and is seen to be so, when we consider, that He who is the Lord and Head of the Church is represented as himself “the Chief Shepherd”—the primary and presiding Pastor over all others; and that none can prosper but as *He* pleases

“to give the, increase.” He cannot but be expected to have his eye and his heart on those who are most faithful and most devout; and to be ready, when besought, to give “that grace which is sufficient for them, and that strength which is perfected in weakness.” “*Separate* from Him they can do nothing.” By faith and prayer, they maintain with him their vital connection;—*that* being maintained, they may expect to be honored with “*the supply of the Spirit of Christ Jesus;*”—and if so, their character and course will come to be distinguished by every thing *opposite* to the representations of the text.

4th.—In the last place, the private prayers

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of the Pastor, in thus “seeking the Lord,” may be regarded as an essential part of his ministerial duty, inasmuch as they are necessary to the exercise of *ministerial intercession*.

We hold not with any official priesthood in the Christian Church. The only real priest is the Lord Jesus Christ; under Him, the whole Church, including ministers and people alike, are “a royal priesthood;”—there is no other priestly order besides these. The work of intercession—a work connected with the priestly function—belongs to both. In heaven, Christ intercedes for the Church; on earth, the Church for the world. But not only does the Church, considered as a whole, thus intercede for man with God, but individual Christians

can intercede for each other, and pastors for their people, and the people for *them*. We believe in no intercession of saints, but such as can be exercised *in the present world*. We find no proof or indication of any such

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in the apostolic writings. Paul frequently asks the prayers of the faithful on earth, but never those of the blessed in heaven. Again and again he assures the church of his prayers for its members, but says nothing of their continuance after his departure. Nay, there is a striking contrast, illustrative of this subject, between Christ and the apostle, in relation to the manner in which, respectively, they contemplated their separation from the Church by death. Christ said—"It was expedient for *him to go away*"—*expedient for his disciples*,—because he was going to the Father, and would "*pray the Father to send unto them another comforter.*" Paul says, it would be better for him *personally* to depart and to be with Christ; but *in respect to usefulness to others*, it was *expedient for him to stay*—"to *abide in the flesh*" for "the furtherance of the faith and joy of the Church." It is impossible that he, who thus spoke and felt, could have had any

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idea of helping, by his intercession in the heavenly world, those whom he left sojourning on earth; much less of becoming himself the object of dependence and prayer, so that his aid should be sought throughout all time, and from all places; from the

field and the city, the wilderness and the ocean, the road-side, the closet, the cathedral, "the ends of the earth and the isles of the sea!" Why, with such an idea, he would have felt that he had the prospect of his sphere of usefulness being indefinitely enlarged, and that, like his Master when he was going to change his local and limited ministry on earth for the universal and eternal royalties of heaven, *it was more expedient for him to go than to stay*. As an intercessor in heaven, he would still be exercising influence on earth; and *that*, freed from the infirmities of the earthen vessel,—in a world where there would be no necessity for repose or sleep,—no cessation, from travelling or imprisonment,—no ab-

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sorption of time by vulgar occupations,—no local confinement from being in the body,—no termination of activity by death. Thoughts like these, the Lord *had*;—prospects like these, it was his to cherish; but Paul was ignorant of such distinctions awaiting him—*this* world to *him* was the place for prayer.—Thus, for official priestly mediation on earth, and for saintly intercession in heaven, we believe the Scriptures to contain no evidence; but they do contain much that should enforce upon Christians present habitual intercession for each other; and upon Christian pastors, the importance of their prayers for the prosperity of the flock. The apostles disentangled themselves from what was secular in the concerns of the church, that they might give them-

selves *entirely*, not only to the ministry of the word, but to *prayer*;—prayer, including, we believe, not only public exercises *with* the people, but frequent private supplications *for* them; and these we hold to be

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essential to the completeness of ministerial duty and the certainty of ministerial success. A bishop cannot be “blameless”—“making full proof of his ministry”—unless, in its measure, he is as assiduous in private prayer as in public teaching. He can no more accomplish his mission to the world by preaching alone, than by praying alone. It would be thought absurd for a man never to leave his closet—professing to do the work of an evangelist there—without ever addressing his message to mankind; but it would be equally absurd for another man to think he could accomplish it by being always in the pulpit—doing exclusively what is done *there*—without frequent private intercession to God. Both are necessary—both alike and equally necessary. The same obligation that lies upon the minister to preach to the people, lies upon him to pray for them; one is as much the requirement of his office as the other.

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V.

Having thus explained and enforced the subject suggested by the text, I shall conclude this discourse by one general remark, showing, how the principle of all that we

have advanced is sustained and illustrated by our Lord's example.

"Rising up a great while before day," He went forth to a solitary place and prayed. In the evening, after many and long-continued labours, he dismissed the multitude, sent away his disciples, retired to a mountain, and "continued all night in prayer to God." Before choosing and ordaining the twelve, he spent some time in special supplication. He taught his disciples to pray. He purged the temple because "his Father's house was to be a house of prayer." When on the mount, it was "as he *prayed*" that "the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his rai-

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ment became white and glistening." Had he not prayed, it might be, that the Divine glory would not have burst forth, nor the Divine voice been heard from the midst of it. The admonition of that voice to "hear him," may have respect to him as he appears in the attitude of prayer, as well as when he discharges the function of a prophet. When he sustained another transfiguration, and underwent the baptism of blood, "he offered up prayers, with strong crying and tears;" again and again he prayed, going and returning, "saying the same words." He prayed for Peter by name. He prayed for the twelve. He prayed for all that should believe on him through their word. He prayed in privacy and solitude. He prayed surrounded by his disciples. He prayed at the grave of

Lazarus. He prayed on the cross—in the midst of his murderers and *for* them. Prayer, with him, was a habit and a necessity. He prayed “without ceasing;” and

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hence, he was always ready for any work that required for its performance the instrumental fitness flowing from devotion. Thus, when his disciples failed to cast out a demon that could only be expelled “by prayer and fasting,” *he* took and expelled it immediately; indicating, by this, the holy element in which he constantly lived and moved. His last words on earth were prayer; his first in heaven, prayer—for he went thither “to appear in the presence of God for us,” and to act upon the promise, “*Ask, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*” “He ever lives to make intercession,” and because he does so, “He can save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him.” The flock spread throughout all the world—his holy and glorious church—would be scattered and lost if he ceased to pray. Its continuance and prosperity are suspended on the function, within the vail, of the “Chief Shepherd.” Thus,

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the personal character of Christ on earth, in every aspect in which it can be viewed, and the office he continues to sustain in heaven, teach to us all, and especially to ministers, the same lesson. May God grant that this attempt to illustrate and

enforce it may be greatly *blessed,—especially to those whom it most concerns!*

“Chief Shepherd of thy chosen sheep,
From grief and sin set free;
May every under shepherd keep
His eye intent on *thee*.”

* * * In looking over these sheets, it occurs to me to remark, that the intelligent reader will of course understand that the statement, so often repeated in the thirty-third page, is used there in the sense in which it is modified at the beginning of the paragraph by the epithets “frequent” and “earnest.” It is obviously *comparative* not *absolute* prayerlessness, that could be thought of as attributable to such men as the passage depicts. This passage, indeed, it may be noticed, is one of those which requires to be looked at in the light of the principle supplied by the preface to the work.

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