

John 1782
The Wisdom and Importance of Win-
ning Souls to Righteousness.

TWO
SERMONS,

DELIVERED IN THE FIRST PARISH OF

WEST-SPRINGFIELD,

By *JOSEPH LATHROP*, D.D.

ON LORD'S DAY, AUGUST 25, 1816.

BEING THE DAY WHICH CONCLUDED THE *SIXTIETH*
YEAR OF HIS MINISTRY.

SPRINGFIELD :

PRINTED BY THOMAS DICKMAN.

1816.

SERMON I.

PROVERBS XI. 30.

The Fruit of the Righteous is a Tree of Life, and he that winneth Souls is wise.

IN these words Solomon seems to have reference to the benefits derived from the public teachers of religion, who, in the wise and faithful execution of their office, gain men over to the knowledge, love and practice of righteousness.

The benefit, which men receive from such teachers he compares to the *fruit of the tree of life*, which nourishes the soul to spiritual health, and prepares it for a happy immortality. The words are similar to those in the book of Daniel, where the prophet, describing the teachers of the latter times, says, 'They who are *wise* shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they who turn many to *righteousness* as the stars for ever and ever.' The *wise* are they who turn men to *righteousness*. This is a word often used to express the whole of religion.

The general purport of our text is obvious; 'That to recover souls from a state of sin to the love and choice of a holy and godly life, is a noble and excellent work.' In this sense, similar phrases are used in scripture. Paul says of himself and the other Apostles, 'We are ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye *reconciled* to God.' He professes 'to be made all things to all men, that he might by all means *gain* some.' Christians are exhorted to exhibit an example of holiness, that others may be *won* by their good conversation.

To *win* souls is to bring men cordially to embrace religion in faith and practice.

True religion, when appropriated, is seated in the *soul*. It begins in a renovation of the spirit of the mind. It is not merely a verbal profession or external reformation. It is not merely the assumption of a new name, or an ex-

change of the visible manners, it is a turning of the heart from sin to holiness—from the love of the world to the love and service of God.

We may sometimes win men by worldly arguments to join a particular sect, or to adopt certain forms of worship, to discontinue some favorite usages, and to substitute others in their place. But if this is all we do, we have not gained *souls*. When we can persuade men to renounce sin, in its power as well as appearance, and to submit to the influence, as well as assume the form of godliness, then we have won *souls*.

Solomon here signifies, that to win souls is a work in the performance of which there is *need of wisdom*. And, indeed, no human wisdom, without the concurrence of divine grace, is equal to it. Paul says, ‘We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who hath made us able ministers of the New Testament.’ ‘Who is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God gives the increase.’

Though we are not sufficient of *ourselves*, yet we may be ministers or agents under God in this work. Paul says, ‘We are workers together with God, who beseeches you by us.’

As God ordinarily brings about the purposes of his grace by his concurrence with, and blessing upon human means, so we are to apply the divinely appointed means of winning souls with the same assiduity, as if the success depended wholly on us; and we are to seek God’s blessing with the same importunity, as if the work were to be effected by him immediately, without any thing done, or attempted to be done on our part. The greater our diligence, prudence and prayerfulness in our work, the stronger is the probability of our success.

In the prosecution of this work, Solomon teaches us, there is need of wisdom, because the work is attended with difficulty. But where is the difficulty?

1st. It arises primarily from the *corruption of the human heart*.

The mind, sunken under the power of lust, is enmity to God. It is not, and chooses not to be subject to his will.

Sin and holiness are, in their nature and inclination, opposite to each other. The heart in which sin reigns with its full power, opposes the means of holiness. It is studious to confront the evidence of truth, and to evade the force of argument. The word of God is indeed sharp, as a two-edged sword; but the evil heart, incrustated and hardened with the habits of vice, turns aside its point, or repels its force.

Address a careless and obstinate sinner on the importance of religion, and apply every argument you can collect to recommend it to his choice, how easily will he find ways to pacify his conscience in rejecting every thing you say. He will, perhaps, call it all religious cant and hypocrisy; or he will think you enthusiastic or superstitious; or if you are an officer in the church, he will imagine, that you aim at nothing more than to keep up a good appearance and discharge the formalities of your office. Or he will flatter himself, that he has religion enough; for he behaves with decency among men; he shuns the gross vices of the world; and many pretenders to religion are no better than he. To make his case seem more plausible, he will magnify the infirmities of christians into real crimes, and their accidental faults into habitual vices. He will recur to the mercy of God, which, he hopes, is too great to consign any of his creatures to final misery; or at the worst, he trusts, he may obtain pardon by a future repentance.

To silence all these evasions it requires much wisdom. To answer them rationally is indeed easy. But to silence them effectually, is a matter of difficulty.—If you would be begotten of God by the word of truth, be swift to hear, and lay apart all filthiness.

2d. Another difficulty in winning souls arises from the *seductions* and *enticements*, which wicked men practise upon one another.

There are those, who strengthen the hands of evil doers, that none may turn from iniquity. Hence these cautions in scripture. ‘If sinners entice you, consent ye not. Take heed, lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your steadfastness.’ Hence the resolution of the Psalmist, that ‘evil doers should depart from him, because he would keep the commandments of God.’

The corruptions, which reign in the hearts of sinners, incline them to hear and receive suggestions unfavourable to religion. These suggestions are pleasing to them. They contemplate them with a mind strongly prejudiced in their favor. They fondly retain them—wish and hope they may be true, because they soothe the pains and calm the disquietudes of their conscience. If you would keep God's commandments, depart from evil doers.

3d. The *interests* of the *world* throw difficulties in the way of winning souls.

These predominate in corrupt minds. These engross the thoughts and cares, and exclude those serious contemplations and reflections, which must be admitted before there can be a rational and deliberate choice of religion. 'They who will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.'

Since there are such difficulties in winning souls, he who would win them, must be wise.

There is a wisdom which concerns the *public teachers* of religion. The great object of their office is to gain men over to the interest of truth and holiness. That they may attain this object, they must execute their office with wisdom. Paul says, 'We preach Christ warning every man, and teaching every man in all *wisdom*, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.'

They must preach the pure Gospel of Christ, declaring his whole counsel. They must choose out acceptable words; but upright words, even words of truth.

They must use great plainness of speech, such plainness as is adapted to common understandings. They must speak with demonstration of the spirit, commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

They must know how to speak a word in season, and to divide to every one his portion. They must exhort and reprove with all long suffering and doctrine, waiting on God to give the success.

They must live the religion which they teach, and shew themselves patterns of good works, that the ministry be not blamed.

But the work of winning souls belongs not exclusively to ministers; It is common to all christians in their various places and stations.

The *Parent* is to win the souls of his children by giving them seasonable instructions, reproofs and warnings; by restraining them from the ways of the ungodly; and by training them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Every man, whether he stands in a peculiar relation or not, is bound to recommend religion by a blameless, and beneficent life. His light is so to shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify God. He is not only to believe, but openly to declare his belief of the Gospel, and to shew, by his daily conversation, his sense of the importance of the religion which the Gospel teaches. He is to lend his aid in support of all prudent measures for the success of the Gospel at home, and for the spread of it abroad: and never suffer his worldly interest to stand in competition with the great work of winning subjects to God.

As the success of all means depends on the blessing of God, all christians are to strive together in their prayers to him, that his word may have free course and be glorified.

The words of our text naturally lead us to another observation; that to labor for winning souls is our greatest *wisdom*. *He that winneth souls is wise*.

1. He is wise because he confers the greatest benefit in his power, on the souls whom he wins.

Look round on the human race. Think what beings they are. They are rational, moral, accountable agents, designed for immortality, placed in a state of probation, soon to pass away and exist for ever in happiness or misery. There are some, there are doubtless many, who are enemies to God by corrupt hearts and wicked works—who are under guilt and exposed to eternal condemnation. How deplorable will be their future condition, if they should pass hence in their present estrangement from God and holiness. This is a day of hope—a day of salvation—And say: Are not these souls worth saving? How shall they be saved? They must first be won to embrace religion—to believe, profess, and obey it—to renounce sin, and become real friends to God. In a state of enmity to him, they cannot be happy—they must be miserable. If there is any thing which we can do to gain them over to God, and win them to the choice and practice

of religion, what can we do more friendly—more useful—more important to them? By winning souls, we save them from the wrath to come—from the vengeance of eternal fire. If it is wise to do good, it is wise to do the greatest good in our power. There is not any good which we can do them, equal to this. He that converts a sinner from the error of his ways, saves a soul from death. It is a great thing to save *one* soul. How great to save *many*. There is a joy in heaven over *one* sinner that repents. How great the joy, when *many* repent?—When many are pressing into the kingdom of heaven? There is an inexpressible pleasure in reflecting, that we have rescued a neighbor, a friend, a child from a natural death—from an untimely grave. How vast the pleasure in reflecting that we have saved a soul from the wrath to come?

2. He who wins souls is wise, because the good which he does is *of great extent*. It is not confined to those who are reclaimed by his means, but may reach, and probably will reach to many others.

‘He who converts a sinner from the error of his ways, hides,’ or prevents ‘a multitude of sins;’ not only in the person first converted, but in those also, who might have been corrupted by his evil conversation and example. He who once destroyed, now effects and promotes much good. He now co-operates with the friends of religion in advancing and extending its interest. He now bears testimony against error and wickedness, and in favor of truth and righteousness. He lays a foundation, in his own house, for building up a godly family. From hence religion may spread to other families, and be transmitted to succeeding generations.

None knows how much good may follow from the conversion of *one* sinner. Who can conceive what extensive and lasting benefits accrued to mankind from the conversion of Paul? That influence which he once employed against the truth, was now directed to its advancement. ‘He obtained mercy, that in him Christ might shew forth all long suffering for a pattern to them, who should afterwards believe to everlasting life.’

Probably no other man ever was, or ever will be so useful in the world, as was this great Apostle. But every good man, however humble his condition, contracted his

sphere, or feeble his powers, may be useful to some.— He may contribute something to strengthen the cause of religion, and increase the happiness of his fellow mortals.

3. He that winneth souls is wise, because he acts in the *cause* and imitates the *example* of the great Redeemer.

Jesus came into our world to seek and to save them who are lost. For this purpose he offered himself a sacrifice on the cross, and opened a way for the exercise of God's pardoning mercy to guilty mortals. He stated the terms of pardon, which are repentance of sins past, and a sincere purpose of new obedience. While he was on earth, he called sinners to repentance. When he returned to heaven, he commissioned his apostles to repeat, extend and urge his gracious call.

The conversion and salvation of sinners is the great interest, which the Redeemer has at heart. In their conversion he sees the travail of his soul and is satisfied. When we win souls to him, we serve his cause, imitate his benevolence, and shew ourselves to be his friends.

While he dwelt among men, his labors were directed to this grand object, to make men wise, good and happy.— He spent no time in teaching the arts of wordly gain. If he made any use of these in his instructions, it was only to illustrate spiritual things. His whole business, as a teacher, was to rectify their errors and reclaim them from their sins; state the nature and urge the importance of true religion; explain the terms of salvation, and press a compliance with them. These he considered as matters of primary concern; the others only of subordinate consequence. It was his command, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God. Trust God for things needful in the present life. These will be added.' 'Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that which endures to everlasting life.'— 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, but treasures in heaven.' If we act in the spirit of Christ's religion, we shall not only obey these instructions in regard to ourselves, but employ our influence in persuading others to obey them. If we value as we ought, the interest of Christ's kingdom, we shall be active in gaining subjects to him. What James says of charity, may be applied to the present case, 'If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say to him, Be thou

warmed, and be thou filled, but give him not the thing needful for the body, what doth it profit? So if we say, let Christ's kingdom come in the world; but do nothing more to advance his kingdom, what does our prayer profit? Faith without works is dead, being alone. Prayers without works are no better. We must love and we must pray, not in word and tongue only, but in deed and in truth.

4. It is wise to win souls, because this is to rescue them out of the hands of the *great adversary* of Christ and his church.

Satan has set up a design in the world, in opposition to the kingdom of Christ. Hence he is called 'The god of this world;' and said 'to blind the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine into them.' Error and wickedness are called '*his works*;' and the place where they prevail is called the place where '*he dwells*, and where *his seat is*.' They who oppose the truth, and promote irreligion are called '*his children*,' because they partake of his temper, and serve his cause. He is said 'to work in the children of disobedience,' and they are said to be taken in his snare, and to be led captive by him at his will.' They who are his slaves and captives are doomed to the punishment prepared for him and his angels.

They who win souls, recover them from the snare of the devil, and bring them into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Every victory which we gain over this enemy is a glorious achievement.

If we would wish to defeat an enemy who was invading our territories, captivating our fellow citizens and subverting our government, and if, in such a case, we would fly to the support of those who were immediately exposed to his power and artifice; with how much greater zeal should we act against an enemy, who is making war on men's souls, and plotting to bring them under his tyrannical domination? With what compassion should we look on those who are yielding themselves to his power? With what concern should we recover them out of his hands?

5. It is wise to win souls, because we shall thus secure to ourselves a *great reward*.

There is a peculiar punishment threatened to them who shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, and corrupt

the earth with their abominations. And there is a distinguished reward promised to such as reclaim sinners from the error of their ways, and bring them into the kingdom of Christ. ‘They who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they who turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.’ If there is a joy in heaven over a sinner, when he repents, how great will be the joy of those, who, by their faithful admonitions, winning exhortations, and engaging examples, have brought *numbers* to repentance. Paul anticipated a glorious felicity, when he should meet in heaven those, who by his ministry, had been gained over to the faith of the Gospel, and made heirs of eternal life. ‘What is our hope and joy and crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? Ye are our glory and joy.’ Why were these his joy?—Because the gospel, which *he* preached, came to them with power, and they turned to God from idols and waited for his Son from heaven. They became examples to all who believed; and from them sounded out the word of God far around, and in every place their faith toward God was spread abroad.

‘The fruit of righteousness is the tree of life.’ This is a metaphor used by St. John to express that glorious immortality, which awaits the righteous in the heavenly world. That world he compares to a great city. ‘In the midst of that city,’ he says, ‘is a pure river of the water of life, on either side of which grows the tree of life, yielding its fruit every month. The righteous have right to eat of this tree, and to enter through the gates into the city.’

The faithful minister, who by his wisdom, has won many to righteousness, will have a distinguished share in that sublime felicity. His employment in diffusing the knowledge, and promoting the temper and practice of the religion of the gospel, may be supposed to have some influence on himself. Deplorable will be the case of that man, who, when he has preached the way of salvation to others, shall himself be a castaway. Paul trembled at the thought of such an issue of his own ministry. The minister’s diligence in his work, though unsuccessful among his people, will entitle *him* to a reward. But if his people

should be gathered, how great will be his joy? O, that you and I, my people, may meet each other with mutual joy in the presence of Christ, when he shall appear in his glory.



SERMON II.

PERMIT me now, my hearers, to lead your minds to some useful deductions and reflections, which naturally result from our subject.

1st. It suggests to ministers the *manner*, in which they ought to preach the gospel. The *winning* manner is that which wisdom dictates.

Whether your present minister has preached with this wisdom, he presumes not to say. But he can say, without arrogance, that he wishes his successor may possess a due portion of ministerial wisdom. He hopes and prays, that a faithful and *wise* steward will be made ruler over this part of the Lord's household.

Our Lord himself, by his example, has taught us a winning manner of preaching. There were cases, indeed, in which he spake with a pungent severity; especially when he reproved the palpable viciousity, the obstinate incredulity, the implacable animosity of the scribes and pharisees. But such errors in sentiment or conduct as arose from the weakness of nature, or from the disadvantages of an unhappy education, he corrected in soft and gentle language, and by plain and familiar addresses. His apostles imitated his example. This is a part of Paul's charge to Timothy. 'The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle towards all men, patient, apt to teach, in meekness instructing them who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil.'

The most probable method to recover men from error, is to instruct them with meekness.

We may sometimes meet with those, who have fallen into errors of dangerous tendency. We wish to reclaim them. What shall we do? Shall we immediately denounce their persons as reprobate, and their sentiments as damnable? No; we thus put them on self-defence. They summon up every argument to persuade themselves, that their opinions are well founded. We lose their confidence—we close their minds against conviction. They become confirmed in their errors. The mind too suddenly and violently pressed will naturally recoil. Forceable action will often produce reaction in mental, as well as in material operations. It is the soft answer which turns away wrath. It is the meekness of wisdom which disarms prejudice. If we would win men to embrace the truth, we must shew by our own meekness, humility and patience, that the truth, which we have embraced, has rendered us more courteous—more amiable.

We who are ministers must be fellow helpers to the truth, and fellow workers to the kingdom of God. With this view we must maintain a freedom and candour in our brotherly intercourse—We must expostulate, where we think there is occasion; explain our own conduct, when others doubt its propriety; never hastily take up, much less circulate, least of all originate a reproach against our brethren.

The Apostles rebuked Peter for preaching to the *Gentiles*. They thought he had stepped over the line of his commission. Peter was not offended. He stated the reason of his conduct. His brethren heard him and were satisfied, and union was preserved. John sent letters of admonition to the angels of the churches in Asia—He acknowledged them as *angels* or *pastors* of those churches. But he exhorted them to correct their errors and amend their conduct. Paul attended the *Jewish* worship in the synagogue at Antioch. The ruler of the synagogue reciprocated Paul's candor. Having finished his service, he invited the Apostle to preach in his turn. The invitation was accepted, and a gospel sermon was preached. While the scribes and pharisees sat in Moses's seat, Jesus directed his disciples to attend their ministrations; but cautioned them not to be misled by corrupt examples. The candor, gentleness and prudence with which the Apostles

conducted their ministry, contributed much to their success. If we hope to win souls, we must be wise.

Our preaching must be recommended by a correspondent example. We must shew out of a good conversation our works with meekness of wisdom. In our religion we must be zealous without ostentation, familiar without meanness, condescending without servility, and maintain a dignity of character without haughtiness of manners. It will be happy if we can adopt Paul's appeal to the Thesalonians. 'Ye are witnesses and God also, how holily, justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you—Ye know how we exhorted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory.—We were gentle among you even as a nurse cherisheth her children.'

2. If it is wisdom to win souls, extreme is the guilt of those who disaffect souls to religion, and turn them away from the truth. If there be any who scatter poisonous errors and disseminate licentious opinions—any who sow discord among brethren, and cause divisions and offences in the churches—any who oppose the proper means of spreading the Gospel of Jesus—any who seduce the young from the paths of virtue, and weaken the salutary influence of parents in the education of their children; these are open enemies to Christ and his cause—these are counter-working his benevolent plan—these are bringing on themselves swift destruction.

3. If it is wise to win souls, then wise are the souls who are won.

If any are conscious, that they have hitherto lived regardless of religion and inattentive to their salvation, it is high time that they should consider and realize their danger. Such, my fellow mortals, is your danger, that every benevolent Christian of your acquaintance, trembles for you, and wishes your deliverance. And ought you not to feel some concern for yourselves? It is the duty of others to apply means and offer prayers for your conversion; and have you nothing to do? Your salvation cannot be of the same importance to any other, as it is to you; and nothing which others do for you, will be of any avail, if you will do nothing for yourselves. Their instructions

will not enlighten you, if you will not hear them. Their warnings will not awaken you, if you will not apply them. Their exhortations will not move you, if you will not reflect upon them. Their prayers will not save you, if you will never pray for your own salvation. Great good may be done for you by others, if you will co-operate with them. But if you spurn, repel and trample upon the means which they apply for your benefit, their benevolence will aggravate your guilt and misery.

4. How delightful is the prospect, when we see multitudes bending their attention to the salvation of their souls, setting their faces for heaven—enquiring the way thither—encouraging and aiding one another in the way, and calling on those around to accompany them? But how lamentable the state of a people, when the means of religion are regarded with cold indifference and treated with impious neglect—when few ask what they must do to be saved; and few attend to the instructions which are given them? Let them contemplate their own danger; let them contemplate the danger of rising posterity.—Let them hear the voice of wisdom—hear it for themselves—hear it for their children. ‘How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorers delight in scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof. ‘I will pour out my spirit, and make known my words unto you? Forsake the foolish and live, and go in the way of understanding.’ You will say, ‘A change of heart is indeed necessary—but this must be a work of God—It is not our work.’ But perhaps this is urged merely to pacify your conscience in the neglect of plain duty.

It is often urged by the careless. If you are under deep convictions of sin, I know, you feel your insufficiency to renew your hearts. But can you not attend on the *means* which God has put into your hands? Can you not forsake the foolish? Can you not renounce the gross forms of wickedness? Can you not go and spread before God the desires of grace which are excited in you?—‘Turn ye at my reproof,’ says wisdom, ‘Behold I will pour out my spirit unto you.’

The prophets foretel a day, when God will grant such plentiful effusions of his grace, that converts shall be multiplied, and his church shall be increased with men like a

flock, and shall be filled with flocks of men. Then one and another, astonished at the pleasing appearance, shall say to his neighbor, 'Lift up thine eyes and see. All these gather themselves together. Our sons and our daughters come to the church to be nursed at her side. They fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows.' Transporting sight. Are there any present, but who would say, 'We wish to behold such a delightful scene?' Remember, God hath said, He will be enquired of to do it for us.—Let your prayers ascend to the God of grace for the effusions of his spirit on your seed, and of his blessing on your offspring. Let your children be brought in your arms and carried on your shoulders to be nursed in the bosom of the church. And when they arrive to proper age, encourage them to subscribe with their own hands to the Lord.

Ye who are parents, if ye desire to see your children joining^{ing} the holy flock, go, join it yourselves. Thus animate and strengthen them. The promise of the spirit is particularly made to the seed and offspring of *God's servants*. Act in this character, and the promise is to you and your children. The language of pious zeal in the parent is this, 'Let us go speedily, and pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts; *I will go also.*' It is this personal resolution, which gives energy and warmth to parental exhortations. Without this they will be languid. They will drop cold from your lips, freeze in your children's ears, and may never reach their hearts.

5. We learn from our subject the importance of the gospel ministry, as an institution of God for the purpose of winning souls to him, and the obligations of every christian society to observe this institution.

Under all the dispensations of religion, recorded in scripture, there has been an order of men, whose stated office it was to open the truths, and inculcate the duties of religion, and on whose ministrations the people were required to attend.

Wherever there is a competent number of people within a reasonable vicinity, they are bound to seek and support a religious instructor. They who unnecessarily continue without one, continue in manifest rebellion against the order of heaven. I speak not this to criminate

the people of this society. They, for nearly one hundred and twenty years, have had a stated minister. In this space the vacancies have not amounted to three years. For more than half of this space your present minister has stood in the relation which he now sustains.

This day completes sixty years since, at the call of your fathers, I was solemnly consecrated to the service of God, and of their souls, and the souls of their children. My work is nearly finished. Happy they, who in my relation, and at my age, can say with Paul the aged, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.'

In this period of unusual length I have enjoyed a comfortable degree of peace with my people, and have been happy to see them in peace among themselves. I hope my ministry has not been wholly unprofitable to them.— Greater wisdom, diligence and fidelity on my part, might doubtless have rendered it more useful. How much of its unsuccessfulness may be imputed to neglect and inattention on their part, is an enquiry to be made by them—not to be decided by me.

I have, of late, been refreshed in seeing an increased attendance on the stated worship of the sabbath, and very respectable additions to the church. There is reason to believe, that among those who have made no public profession, there are many, whose minds are impressed with a belief of the truth, and a sense of the importance of the gospel, and who contemplate a future union with the church. Let such beware, lest by unreasonable delay they quench the spirit, which works in them, and sink into a state of indolence and indifference.

To you, who think you have experienced the power of divine grace in your souls, I recommend great prudence, humility and circumspection in your daily walk, that you may honor religion, and may win others to embrace it.— Let there be nothing ostentatious or assuming in your manners; nothing uncharitable or censorious in your discourse. Be not rash to condemn those who have not experienced all the same temporary exercises, of which you have been the subjects. Let nothing be done or spoken through strife and vain glory, but in lowliness of mind be

disposed to think others better than yourselves. In a word, let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ.

Let me advise *all* to treat with affection and tenderness those who appear attentive to the great interests of eternity. There may be some, who have had stronger convictions of sin, a more pungent sense of unworthiness, and more alarming terrors from divine threatnings, than you have felt. Impute not these to superstition or enthusiasm—much less to hypocrisy and dissimulation. The methods of grace may be different in different subjects. ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth.’ Never ridicule that which has the appearance of godliness, or looks like a real change of heart from sin to holiness. You will thus give others cause to fear that you are strangers; yea, enemies to the power of religion. When you hear others speak of those powerful exercises which you have not experienced, you perhaps think, that these are not essential to conversion—that a calm, influential love of truth and righteousness is all which can be necessary.—Be it so. But then look into your hearts—review your lives; enquire whether you have this calm, influential love. ‘If your hearts condemn you, God is greater than your hearts, and knoweth all things.’

It is too much the disposition of the careless to talk lightly of internal experimental religion, that they may better pacify their consciences in the want of it. It is wise to keep your minds open to conviction of the truth. For this purpose think seriously, and speak reverently on religious subjects. Never treat them with levity. In this there is impiety of heart as well as rudeness of manners. As it was in the days of the Apostles, so it is now. There are some, who think it strange that their former associates in vanity and vice have forsaken them, and run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of them. But remember, that both apostates and their seducers must give an account to him, who shall judge the quick and the dead.

My friends, hereafter I shall not talk much with you. I shall therefore now speak some things, which at an earlier period might have been omitted.

Maintain a just concern to transmit religion to rising posterity. Content not yourselves to live without an ordained minister, who may dispense the word and ordinances of God to you and your children. Whenever you shall judge it necessary to settle another minister, take good advice, and seek a worthy candidate—a man of pious character, correct behaviour, respectable accomplishments, evangelical principles, competent education, candid and pacific sentiments.

It is now sixty years since the settlement of a minister in this place. All who were active in it are gone off the stage of life. Such a transaction will be new to you all. You will not think me too officious, if I suggest to you the manner in which it will be proper to proceed.

You will first employ some reputable candidate. After a reasonable time of probation, the adult males of the church will assemble to know the general opinion on the question of his settlement. If the church agree in giving him a call to the ministerial work, they will request a legal meeting of the parish for concurrence with them. This meeting, you know, will comprehend those members of the church, who are legal voters in the parish. If the parish refuse a concurrence, the business is terminated, and another candidate will be sought. If they concur, they will make such provision for his support, as justice and prudence dictate, and will give him information, and wait his answer. If he accept the call, the church will be requested to invite a regular council for his ordination. The council, being satisfied with the regularity of the call and the qualifications of the candidate, will solemnly and publicly separate him to the work and office to which he is called.

That the church should lead in this business is agreeable to common usage, to an ancient statute, and the reason of the case.

It is important, that, in *civil* society, there should be a public teacher to inculcate the virtues and manners on which the happiness of society depends; such as truth, peace, justice, industry, temperance and the other moral duties. The gospel, besides requiring the social virtues and duties, teaches the way of salvation, through a glorious Redeemer. In the christian minister, both characters are

united, the *moral* and the *christian* teacher. The church consists of professed *christians*. They will choose a minister, who believes, and will teach, the whole gospel scheme. In the *christian* teacher the purposes of *civil* society are answered; for the gospel inculcates all social virtues and moral duties. But the purposes of a christian church cannot be answered by a mere moral philosopher; for he will have nothing to say in regard to the redemption of fallen men by the Son of God sent down from heaven.— On this reason was founded the statute, which required, that the church should lead in the call of a minister; but at the same time, justly ordered that the town or parish should not be charged with his maintenance without their own concurrence.

Whether this statute now exists in form, or not, I cannot say. Be this as it may; ancient, continued and general usage may have sanctioned it as common law. In your case particularly it must be observed; for by your covenant with the liberal donor of your ministerial fund, the minister, who shall receive the benefit of that fund, must be called and settled with the concurrence of the church and parish. And he must be a pious, learned and christian minister.

The cordiality of my advice respecting your future conduct, and the ardor of my wishes for your best interest, I hope you see no reason to distrust. Can a minister, who has been with you in all seasons of prosperity and adversity for threescore years—who has enjoyed your uninterrupted friendship—who has experienced your kind attention to his wants, and who has consecrated a great proportion of you to God with his own hands; can *he* be indifferent to your happiness? He must then be devoid of christian benevolence; ah; of the common feelings of humanity. He confides in your goodness, that your friendship will still be continued, and in your candor, that allowance will be made for the infirmities of age. And when you shall have performed the last office of respect by laying his withered limbs in the grave, you will retire from the silent mansion in deep contemplation on your own mortality; and will remember in your prayers the relatives who may survive him, and particularly his aged companion, if she should survive; for that day will be to her a day of

affliction. She has for more than fifty-seven years been my helper in the Lord. She respects you. You have not a more cordial friend.

When I look on the congregation of my hearers, I see they are not the persons to whom I spake in my early ministry. I have buried more in number than my whole parish contained, when I was first connected with it. The number of souls was then between five and six hundred—It is now about double. The deaths in this period have been a little less than eight hundred. The baptisms of children have exceeded twelve hundred. Admissions into the church have been about five hundred and fifty. The present number of communicants is not far from two hundred. Perhaps it may a little exceed that number. All who were members of this church, when my relation to it commenced, are now among the dead.

Great changes have I seen; some have been pleasant—some afflicting. The fathers, where are they? Where are the mortals who called me in my youth, to come and minister unto them? Ah! They are gone—gone to their long home. I visited their dying beds—I prayed with them and their friends in the chambers of death—I assisted in the solemnities of their funerals. Their memory is precious. You have come forward in their place. You are as mortal, as were they—You are soon to follow them. For the religious privileges, which you have enjoyed, and still enjoy, you are indebted to the wisdom and piety of those who have lived before you. Remember what they have done for you; consider what *you* are bound to do for those who are coming after you. Train up your children in knowledge and piety, that when your places shall be vacated by death, they may be filled with those who will make provisions for succeeding generations. A generation is of short continuance; but a society by a succession of generations may continue long. By your wisdom in winning the souls of your children to righteousness, you may transmit religion to distant ages; and the children who shall be born, may rise up, and call you blessed.

Let religion be maintained in your families—let prayers be offered in your houses,—let instructions flow from your lips; and let these be enforced by your example.

Require of your families a regular attendance on the instituted worship of the Lord's day, and give attendance yourselves. This is a privilege, which, I trust you and your children will enjoy. For the enjoyment of it few societies are under advantages equal to yours. Your former contest about the location of a meeting house is happily terminated. The proceeds of your parochial property will go far towards the support of the ministry. Your numbers and means are such, that an adequate support cannot be a burden. You appear to be comfortably united. You are not infested with sectaries. They who cause divisions have rarely attempted to disturb your tranquility; or if attempts have been made, they have met with little encouragement. I have often thought, that were I a young man, offering myself for a settlement in the ministry, there are, within the compass of my knowledge, few parishes which I should prefer to this. If you experience the unhappiness of a long vacancy, or of parochial disquietude, the fault must be your own.

I have spoken to you who are fathers. May I speak a word to the young? It will be but a word; for my strength, and perhaps your patience, is nearly exhausted.

My dear children, I feel an interest in your happiness. And what shall I say? Devote yourselves to God in this early period—converse daily with his word—reverence his sanctuary—give yourselves to prayer—make a profession of your faith in the Redeemer—hearken to the counsels of parents—avoid seducing company—shun dangerous amusements—make your souls your care, and religion the object of your attention. Let all your conversation be directed by the gospel. On the course which you now take, and in future pursue, your own happiness and the happiness of thousands may depend. You will soon be acting members of society. Your character in life may give a tincture to those who succeed you.

I feel myself on the verge of another world. I am solicitous, that what has now been spoken to the fathers and their children, may make some permanent impressions.

From the 30th year of my ministry I have called the attention of my people to every tenth anniversary of my ordination. I may perhaps speak to you again. But never, never shall I speak on an occasion similar to the present.—

I may, therefore, with some propriety, and with much affection, take my leave of you, offering my fervent prayers for your welfare, and hoping for your prayers that I may be accepted of God through Jesus Christ.

‘Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect; be of good comfort; be of one mind; live in peace; and the God of love and peace be with you.’

AMEN.