

ARTICLE VI.

A CALL TO THE MINISTRY.

Ever since Jesus Christ commissioned his apostles, there have been intruders into the gospel ministry, pretending to a call which they never received. It is to be supposed there are such now, and will be such to the end of the world. Meanwhile, in every age God has his true ministers whom he calls to the work. How are the true to be distinguished from the false? How is the Church to know the men Christ has given to her to be her ministers and his? How is an individual to know whether he in particular is or is not called to be a minister of Christ and his Church? A man may err on either side, may run unsent or refuse to go when commanded. On the one hand, he may take to himself the honor of the ministry, not being called of God; may aspire without divine warrant to the priesthood, like Korah whom God swallowed up in the earth; may touch the ark unbidden and not "after the due order," like Uzzah upon whom God made a deadly breach¹ for this merely uncommanded and therefore unhallowed touch. Or, on the other hand, like Moses, he may be reluctant to obey the call; like Jeremiah, may plead to be excused through excessive diffidence; like Jonah, rise up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord and from the commission to go and preach to Nineveh. Upon which side of the question it is the greater error and the greater sin to stray from the right path, who shall undertake to decide? And yet the prevailing tendency in the Church appears to be towards urging young men into the glorious ministry of reconciliation—towards persuading them to undertake the awful care of souls.

It is clear that a call to the ministry must be from God. The Lord of the harvest alone must thrust forth laborers into his harvest. If, when God passed over Israel on the night when the first-born of Egypt's men and beasts were destroyed, he set apart as a memorial of this deliverance the first-born of men and beasts in Israel as sanctified to himself; and if afterwards he exchanged

¹ 1 Chron. xv. 13.

these first-born for the tribe of Levi and so these Levites were publicly consecrated to him, and if amongst these Levites he set apart Aaron and his sons to be the priests of the Lord, and so they were publicly set apart for an holy priesthood, and then if he ordained that whosoever should intrude into the Levite's or the priest's office should be put to death,¹ it is clear that, under the Old Testament dispensation, it was God's sole prerogative to designate those who should minister to his people in holy things. But *a fortiori*, we might expect him to claim this for his prerogative under the New Testament dispensation, seeing that under it the ministry is so much more perfectly and completely a spiritual and holy work. Accordingly we find that God the Saviour called his ministers when he was upon the earth by a direct personal call from his own lips. Then, he commissions them to preach to all nations and promises to be himself with them down to the world's end. And Paul so describes the ministry of reconciliation everywhere as to signify that God himself calls men into it. He says of himself that he was "allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel,"² and that Christ had "put him into the ministry."³ Next he tells Timothy that the same had been committed to his trust, and that in turn he was to commit the same to faithful men who should be able to teach others⁴ also down to all generations. The ministry is indeed the Lord's special gift to his bride for her edification, and it would be passing strange if he did not himself choose the individuals whom he will present to her. Ministers in all ages are God's ambassadors with plenipotentiary powers sent to treat with men, and it is incredible that he should not himself appoint them. The apostle sets forth fully in various places how they are to fulfil their ministry, and although he himself sits as the pattern for the picture which he draws, there can be no doubt whatever that he is making a portrait of the faithful and true ministers of every age.⁵

But how is the call of God to be ascertained? There are three elements which when all found existing together in the case, constitute, according to the Presbyterian doctrine, the evidence of

¹ Numbers i. 51; iii. 10.

² 1 Thess. ii. 4.

³ 1 Tim. i. 12.

⁴ 1 Tim. vi. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 2.

⁵ See 2 Cor. v. 18-21; vi. 1-10.

such a call. Our standards contemplate three parties coöperating in this matter, and each party furnishing a share of the proof of the call from God. They suppose “a candidate applying to the Presbytery to be licensed;” a “people prepared to elect a pastor” after the probationer shall have preached amongst them to their satisfaction; and a Presbytery “fully satisfied with the qualifications for the sacred office” which the probationer has exhibited upon examination time and again in various ways. This account applies, of course, to the final determination of the case towards which all the steps previously taken have from the first been looking. The three elements of the evidence that any man is called to the ministry accordingly are:

- I. The individual's conviction that he is called.
- II. The desire of a people for his ministerial labors.
- III. The concurrent judgment of the proper court of the Lord's house.

All these together do not constitute the call, for that is from the Lord; but by these three elements of evidence concurring, the call is ascertained. Inwardly moved by the Spirit and outwardly invited and commissioned by the Church, a man may be said to be called of God to the ministry. Let us take up these elements in their order

I. The first is *the man's own convictions*. Convictions of what? His convictions that he is called to preach the gospel. These may be more or they may be less clear and definite. In some cases they are like a fire in the bones, as Dr. Thornwell expressed it, and the man feels like Paul, “Woe be unto me, if I preach not the gospel.” He must preach or die, he must preach or perish! This kind of convictions it is manifest is much to be desired by all ministers, and they all ought to pray God to give them such a clear and decided call; whilst all who have received such impressions have the greatest reason to thank the Master for peculiar favor and distinguishing grace; and honor and happiness. It must, of course, be a great comfort to any minister to enjoy this unquestioning sense of duty. In the midst of the toils and temptations, the difficulties and discouragements, of the ministerial work to feel no misgivings that one is running unsest or speaking without a specific

commission must be indeed consolatory. Every candidate for the ministry may well implore from the Lord some such experience as this during his preparatory course, for he is looking forward to a work of the greatest magnitude, perplexity, and difficulty. He is expecting to assume responsibilities at which (as Thornwell said) "an angel might tremble." And to be assured of his call from heaven, to be certified of his divine commission beyond every doubt, would be like the assurance of his own salvation—an anchor to his soul in every storm.

Now, does it not seem natural to suppose that the degree of life and force and earnestness which shall attach to the convictions of different men whom God really calls to the ministry that they are thus really called of him, will in ordinary cases depend somewhat upon the mental and moral constitution of the individual? Do not different men ordinarily *know* things and *feel* things, even the very same things, in a different way? Is not clear conviction a different thing ordinarily in different men? Does not the very life of God in the soul of man—does not this heavenly force and power itself ordinarily manifest itself in different persons with certain differences which depend on constitutional peculiarities? Can we say of true Christians that they all have the same degree of clearness and the same degree of depth and the same degree of vigor of perception in regard to the dreadfulness of sin, or in respect to the preciousness of Christ? May we not, then, expect a difference of the accidents, while the essence is the same, in the convictions severally of men whom God has really and truly called to preach? There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are diversities of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

What, then, is the essence and what are the accidents of such a call to preach as we are considering? What are the true and sufficient grounds of the conviction of being thus called, and what grounds are unreal and unsatisfactory ones? In other words, what things prove or disprove an individual's call to the ministry?

1. It is not essential that a man should so desire the work that he feels no reluctance to enter upon it. The apostle says : "If a

man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work," but he by no means asserts that every one called does desire it. He begins his statement with an "if." In fact, it has often happened that God's truly called ministers did not desire to go at his bidding. Moses did not and Jonah did not desire to go, yet both were certainly called of God to go. Many an ancient bishop of the best character cried "*Nolo episcopari*—I wish not to be made bishop"—and hid from those who desired him ordained. Augustine shed many tears in vain when the people seized him and brought him by force to the bishop and required him to be ordained a presbyter. Paulinus also was ordained by force. Cyprian and Gregory, Thaumaturgus and Athanasius and Evagrius and Ambrose, all absconded to escape ordination. Calvin, time and again, excused himself from entering on the work of the ministry, until God, to use his own expression, "seized him by his awful hand from heaven." On one occasion it was Farel, on another, Bucer, who adjured him in the name of God, and "terrified," says the great Genevese, "by the example of Jonah held up before me, I again accepted the teaching function." So Knox long resisted his call, but being publicly adjured by John Rough from the pulpit, at the desire of the people, he was compelled to yield. And in our own times, the same experience belongs to faithful ministers truly called of God. Dr. Thomas L. McBryde, a well known and much loved minister of the Synod of South Carolina, now deceased, resisted his call for a long time; but there have been few of our ministers whom God has more highly honored. So, too, Dr. Thornwell struggled long and hard against his convictions, much preferring to practise law and aspiring to statesmanship rather than to preach the gospel; and he did not yield until there was made upon his mind the distinct impression that he must either preach or be damned.

A man's desiring or his not desiring to preach, therefore, is nothing whatever in the case we are considering. Some who are called do not desire it, and many desire it who are not called to it. Many a German Anabaptist and many an English sectary in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, could not rest, but intruded themselves into the ministry. As the London Ministers

express it in their *Divine Right of Church Government*, “Aversion at manual work, pride of abilities, a disturbed imagination, a carnal project to promote self, prompt the man to be preacher.” In these very days a young man may think it would improve his social position to be a minister, or give him ease, money, name, and power, and so he may very much desire the office, but not be called of God. On the other hand, from the very same or from similar motives, he may not desire the office, although God is really calling him to it. His ambition to become eminent at the bar or in medicine, his desire to grow rich, his indolent love of ease, his cowardly fear of men, his selfish desire to be settled pleasantly and speedily in life--some such disposition may cause him to be greatly averse to the self-denying and laborious and painful duties of the ministry, whilst nevertheless the Almighty may in his sovereignty have selected this very man, as he did the persecuting Saul, for a chosen vessel to bear his name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. It comes, therefore, to this, that the desire of a man for the office of the ministry does not prove his call, nor his lacking this desire disprove it.

Yet, in our Form of Government, the candidate is expected to declare that he has been “induced to seek the office” “from love to God and a sincere *desire* to promote his glory in the gospel of his Son.” Now, what is the significance of this question, if the desire we have been considering is no proof of a call? The answer is, that the plain and simple meaning of that question is to ask whether the man being himself convinced that he is called of God, and therefore seeking now to be inducted by Presbytery into the ministry, is able solemnly to profess that he is moved by no improper considerations, but operated on simply by love to God, and the wish to glorify him in this work. He is not called on to affirm that he bases his conviction of his being called on his desiring the office; and oftentimes a truly called candidate would have to reply that he is conscious of no such desire at all. All which the question in our Form calls on the candidate to profess is, that his motives are proper and not improper ones.

2. Promising appearances in the circumstances which surround a man do not prove, and unpromising ones do not disprove, his

call to the ministry. A popular writer on this subject urges the individual to “notice the indications of providence,” and maintains that “this kind of evidence is available to strengthen or diminish his convictions of duty.” But great is the mystery of providence. That is a hard book to read. Like prophecy, it has to be read mostly backwards. “We are prone to misinterpret what are called the *leadings of providence*,” says Dr. Thornwell, “and to take those things as intimations of the divine will, which are perhaps only designed to be trials of our faith. I am quite satisfied that no one can ever reach the will of God in his own particular case, by judging merely from promising appearances. The measures of human probability—it is a lesson recorded on every page of the Bible—are not the standard of divine wisdom. Every striking instance of faith commended in the Scriptures was *against* the conjectures of our narrow philosophy. Had Moses reasoned according to the prevailing principles of our day, he would not have refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. The prospect of extensive usefulness was so much greater at the court, the sphere of his influence would have been so much wider, he had been singularly raised to that elevated station, and the hand of God was so visibly in the whole affair, that if he had reasoned as multitudes do, from the *leadings of providence* and probable appearances, he would have felt justified in accepting the glittering bribe which was offered to him. **In** this, however, he would have followed the impulse of human reason and been no example of faith.”—SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW, Vol. xxiii., p. 330.

3. Nor does zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls make a call to the ministry, for then every true believer would of course be called to it.

4. Nor is love for the kind of employment which pertains to ministers any part of the essence of the call, for many love that who are certainly not called.

5. Nor is the belief that greater usefulness may be attained in this than in any other service, essential to this call. It is very common for candidates to assign this as their main reason for seeking the ministry. The eminent Dr. Spring of New York, in

his excellent volume on the *Power of the Pulpit*, states the case thus: "Whether he can the better serve God and his generation by engaging in some one of the learned professions or in the ministry of his Son—this is the only question which a conscientious man will look at." Now, how is the conscientious man to form any proper judgment upon such a question as this? How can any man tell where he in particular can best serve God and his generation? That depends on what may be the will of God respecting him and his calling. What good will he do in the ministry, if God does not put him there? What good can he do out of it, if God's will is that he go into it? The question where he can the better serve God and his generation is, therefore, not a question for any man to determine. "No man," said Dr. Thornwell, "is anything in the kingdom of God, except as God makes him so." Many a truly called minister has spent his whole life sowing in tears without having any visible or external evidence that his labors were in any degree blessed. Vague and uncertain calculations of expediency must not be substituted in the place of God's call. "Duty," says Dr. Thornwell, "must ever be the measure of expediency; and a man can only know in what line he can produce the greatest good by knowing in what line God has called him to labor." Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but only God can give the increase. "The grand question, then, is, Will God bless? and that depends for its answer upon, this other, Has God called?"

6. Nor, in fine, are any good motives, nor all the best possible motives combined, what constitutes a call to the ministry. Nor are any external proofs, nor all combined, enough of themselves to evince that a man has that call from God. It is a question for him, of inward conviction, where no motive should have any place except the motive to obey the call which he feels convinced that God has issued. It is for him a question of *consciousness*—or rather it is for him a question of the Spirit's testimony, where the individual himself must believe that he is called, or the call is not authenticated.

But yet neither

7. On the other hand is it essential to this call that a man

should be addressed by any voice from heaven, or have any vision from God, giving him audibly, or in any other extraordinary way, a commission to preach. No sane Christian would plead that he is not called because he has had no such extraordinary manifestations. No intelligent Presbyterian can fail to acknowledge that the Scriptures are our rule, and that they are the sufficient as well as the only rule, as well of practice as of faith. God makes no new external revelations now. "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture." Such is the language of our Confession; but it explains afterwards that the things upon which Scripture enlightens us are "those which are necessary to be known, observed, and believed for salvation." We do not claim that the Scriptures are always a precise and specific rule of duty; for, in regard to some things, they give only general instructions, and constitute in some things only a negative and not a positive rule. Where does Scripture tell this or that man in particular to go and preach, or the reverse? Where does Scripture tell any minister whether he must accept this or that particular call? Such questions of duty, from the very nature of the case, Scripture can determine for us only generally and negatively. The world could not contain the books which must have been indicted by the Spirit, had it been intended to give us a written rule of practice touching every case we might have to decide. No intelligent Protestant holds that the Bible can positively direct us in regard to every question of daily duty. But all Protestants hold that we have a divine *guide* as well as a divine *rule*. The Scriptures hold forth, and the Presbyterian Confession acknowledges, the necessity of the Spirit's illumination for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word. And believers do enjoy the supernatural guidance of the Spirit. We are taught to pray for him to guide us into all truth and all duty. We need to hear, and we do hear, his voice saying unto us: "This is the way, walk in it." The Scriptures are full of this doctrine of the guidance of the Spirit; and often, indeed, are we comforted by it, for we are constantly

liable to perplexity and doubt about the choice between two or more ways set providentially before us. But we never need to have any new external revelations to guide us, for the word is sufficient, taken negatively when it cannot be taken positively. And the Spirit, so far as he uses means at all in dispensing illuminating and other grace, always honors his ordinary and appointed ones. These are his only channels of grace when he makes use of any channel at all. But we may not confine him to any channels; we may not assent that he acts always through the word and by the Church. He is a person, and he sometimes works in and upon and amongst men directly and immediately. When the word gives us no specific directions, the Spirit often guides by imparting a "*sense of duty*." "My deliberate conviction," says Dr. Thornwell, "is that the only way of arriving at a knowledge of the divine will in regard to us, is by simplicity of purpose and earnest prayer. If we really desire with an honest heart to know our duty, and apply to God to be instructed by him, he will impress upon the conscience a sense of duty just in the direction in which he would have us to move, and which we shall feel it perilous to resist. This 'sense of duty' may be produced by some principles of the word which we perceive to be applicable to the exigency, or by an immediate operation of the Spirit upon the mind, which we are unable to explain. This is my test; and I confess that until after having sought from God, with simplicity and honesty, his divine direction, I feel such a sense of duty' upon my conscience, such a 'woe is me' upon the heart, I should feel it unsafe to move. . . . The meek will he guide his way."--SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW, Vol. XXIII., p. 331. Nor, so long as those inward monitions which claim to be immediately from the Spirit are found to be in concurrence with the word, can there be any danger of their leading to any fanatical abuses.

8. It is not of the essence that the candidate be young or old, poor or rich, trained in a theological school or trained for the ministry in some other way; only he must not be *a novice*. Perhaps God may call him from eminent distinction and a wide and lucrative practice of law or medicine; or perhaps from neither of

these learned professions, but some sphere of common life. The ambassador of God may go from the schools of the prophets, or from the plow-handle, the shoemaker's bench, the blacksmith's shop, the counting-house, the halls of justice, the hospital; but wheresoever he goes from, whether he knows or knows not Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, he must be mighty in the Scriptures, skilled in the doctrines, able to speak the word with wisdom and with power. The call is sovereign. God calls whom he pleases to call, and whom God appoints God anoints. He does not always call boys, but sometimes men of middle age; not always the poor, but sometimes the rich. Nor is there anything in our Form of Government which signifies that ministers must all enter the service by the same door. All the ordinary tests which the Church has appointed, and which ought to be strictly and faithfully applied, belong to ordinary cases, while it is plainly signified that peculiar cases may arise, to be determined in other than the ordinary ways. Even licensure itself is only a way of testing and trying a probationer in ordinary cases; so that even licensure may be dispensed with, if Presbytery judge proper in the circumstances. The Book distinctly puts all the trials upon the ground that the ministry is not to be degraded by being committed to weak, ignorant, or unworthy men, and it everywhere implies that it is for the Presbytery to judge of the individual's qualifications. Accordingly, the sole limit set to the trials which are to be had is *the Presbytery's being satisfied*, and the whole responsibility is thrown, as it ought to be and must be, upon them. All this evinces plainly that the way in which a man is trained to preach, and his age and his condition in life, with other like peculiarities, are all mere circumstances, and not of the essence.¹

¹ "Mr. Brownlow North, as to whom 'many ministers and elders who had opportunity of hearing him, believed that his exceptional gifts deserved exceptional recognition,' received a public welcome from the Free Church Assembly of 1859, of which Dr. Cunningham was Moderator. In the course of an address, in which he said he 'concurred heartily in the grounds on which this judgment had been come to,' Dr. C. remarked: " 'It is proper, in the way of explanation, for me to say that I have adopted the resolution of declining to take any active part in promoting

Having thus looked at what is not essential, let us pass on to consider briefly what is to be considered of the essence.

1. A man cannot be called to preach the gospel who has not the necessary *gifts and graces*. Manifestly God does not ordinarily call any man to do what he has no fitness to do. The needful gifts are understood to be a measure of bodily health and strength, a tongue which does not stutter or stammer intolerably, such native and acquired powers of mind as constitute a man not “weak and ignorant,” and such force and goodness of character as constitute him not “weak and unworthy” in the sense in which those terms are used in our Book. Feeble, inefficient, shallow, empty-headed dawdlers and drones; fickle, inconstant men with-

cases of deviation from our ordinary rules in regard to the licensing of probationers. But although I thought it prudent in my circumstances (Dr. C. was Professor in the Theological Seminary) to adopt such a resolution, it did not arise in the least from any jealousy as to the perfect warrantableness and expediency of occasional deviations from our ordinary arrangements. I never could see the warrantableness of any Church of Christ, however deeply impressed with its importance in ordinary circumstances, venturing to lay down as a resolution that she would not see and would not recognise gifts for preaching or for the ministry, except in men who had gone through the whole of the ordinary curriculum. No Church has a right to lay down that rule. This Church has not laid down that rule, and I trust never will. The Church must lay herself open to consider exceptional cases, mark God's hand, and make a fair use and application of what he has been doing. Everybody admits this in theory, but I have sometimes thought there was some unwillingness to apply it; but I must say I have been of late very desirous to see two or three very good cases of exception of that kind—not only because I would like to see the Church practically recognizing the principles to which I have referred, but for this additional reason, that I have a strong impression that in the actual position of the Church we will find considerable difficulty in keeping up a high standard in regard to the mass of our students, unless we have an open way for occasional exceptions. I believe, if we leave such an opening, it will be of far more importance in enabling us to maintain a high standard, and full compliance with our strict regulations in regard to nineteen-twentieths of our students, than by attempting to carry out the same rule to the whole twenty-twentieths, and thereby running the risk of lowering the standard of the whole body, and losing besides the benefit of the exceptions.’ ”

out purpose or aim, show no signs of being called of God to preach the gospel. Men who could not be expected to succeed in any other calling are not the sort of men the Lord of the harvest will ordinarily thrust into his harvest.

In like manner the needful *graces* are piety, humility, unselfishness, faith, and zeal, without the possession of which no man can give any evidence of being called. These things are essential.

Yet let no son of the Church, who feels in his heart some conscious impressions that it is his duty to preach the gospel, excuse himself, like Moses or Jeremiah, on the ground of felt weakness or incompetency. Be it that you have not ten talents nor even five, but only two, or, let it be only one. A double measure of grace can more than make up the lack of large gifts, and grace is freely bestowed by the Lord when he will. God often makes choice not of wise men after the flesh, not of mighty or noble ones, but of such as the world calls foolish and weak and despised, that no flesh should glory in his presence. He can and he sometimes does so plentifully endow with his grace men whose intellectual furniture is small that they are made to be eminently useful in the ministry. So is it likewise with men lacking physical strength. Some men of feeble frame, like Calvin and Brainerd of past times, and like some of our own time known perhaps to us all, display so much patience and perseverance and endurance and system and energy of mind and heart as compel us to acknowledge that, feeble as their bodies appear, God has nevertheless made them giants for work. We must, therefore, always couple gifts and graces together in judging of fitness to preach the gospel.

2. A man cannot be called to the work of the ministry who lies providentially under any obligations to others which stand in the way of his devoting himself to that work. It is one of the divine proofs which accredit Christianity that it never sets up religion against morality or justice. God forbids the neglect of duty to man on any plea of duty to himself. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught, . . . leave there thy gift," . . . "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not

seen?" "He that provides not for his own, especially those of his own household, is worse than an infidel."

It was on this principle that the ancient Church would not ordain a slave. His time belonged to his master, and God and the Church would not come in betwixt the man and his legal owner. Christ did indeed say when one whom he had called to preach desired to go first and bury his dead father, "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." But that was an extraordinary call from the very lips of the Lord Jesus, and moreover there were probably other sons at home prepared to do what was necessary for the remains of their father. No argument is to be based therefore upon this case to prove that any may now plead a divine call to preach in denial of the just claims of a helpless parent or a dependent sister or a lawful creditor. Yet let it be remembered that Providence may seem to hedge up before us the way of our felt duty only to try our faith and zeal and to drive us to more earnest prayer.

3. It is of the essence of the call that a man have a conviction that he is called to this work of the ministry and to no other work. Whenever God calls, he will convince of the call; otherwise it can be no call. How vain it is to talk of a call from God which is not such as can be heard by the person called, or which cannot be recognised as indeed coming from God! A man whom God calls must needs be impressed with a sense of that call. He will know that he is called by an inward conviction wrought by the Spirit of God. He will know it just as he knows any of the operations of his own consciousness—that he believes, loves Christ, and hopes for heaven. He knows these things because he feels them, and in the same way does he know what the Spirit convinces him of respecting his call—he *feels* it. The conviction may be more or less clear, it may be more or less definite, it may be preceded by more or less severe struggles and conflicts within his soul, it may be accompanied with more or less doubt and misgiving—all these differences will be found in men of different physical and mental and moral constitution, and all these differences will mark the different dispensations of the same Spirit and the different operations of the same grace. But in every case of

the call to preach there will always be that essential thing—the man's own inward conviction, whether it be calm and deliberate or profoundly agitating to his soul.

Without such an internal persuasion of his own call, let no man be encouraged to enter the ministry. For such a settled conviction (more or less clear and determinate) that the King eternal commissions him to this specific work, it is dangerous and it is wicked to substitute any persuasions of private friends or any election by the Church or any favorable judgment by the Presbytery. All these are valuable in their place—two of them are absolutely indispensable. But let no man go forward into this fearful pathway upon any such intimations of his duty by other men, without having in his own soul the settled conviction (more or less decisive and strong) that not man only but God also calls.

The call to preach must be a specific call of this particular man to this particular work of preaching the gospel, and it will and must differ therefore from the general call of duty which is to direct men generally in their general, ordinary, secular operations. The call to be a shoemaker or a butcher or a tailor, the call to be a farmer or a manufacturer or a banker, is, of course, a providential thing, and the Lord and Maker of us all has, of course, a determinate choice as to which one of these worldly callings each of his people shall pursue. But the call to the ministry is not one of these common things, but a very sacred thing and very nigh to our Lord's heart, because it concerns his Church's well-being and his own honor. Amongst these common callings a man is to choose upon general and common principles according to the circumstances which in the providence of God do surround him at the time. But the call to hold office in God's house, to execute an embassy to immortal sinners, clothed with powers plenipotentiary to make peace betwixt God and them—this call is to a high and holy office in the Church to a solemn and to an awful work for the Lord Jesus, and we must not degrade it by comparing it to any secular calling. Low views of the call to preach, like low views of the Church, her doctrines, order, and worship, are the sin of the world, the weakness of certain branches of Protestant Christendom and the reproach and

dishonor of all lax Presbyterians. The consequences of the prevalence of these low views are deplorable. Let any man whom they govern enter the ministry upon some such general ground as that he thinks he can do most good in that service, and he will be very liable to a change of opinions just as soon as he begins to encounter trials and difficulties. His opinion changed, of course his call has vanished and he abandons the work or else through false shame hypocritically holds on to it. This is one chief reason of so much secularisation in the ministry. Men who have no specific call to it by the Holy Spirit weary of the arduous labor and are glad of any excuse to quit it for a secular employment. No man can be relied on to abide constantly faithful in the ministry amidst all its difficulties and discouragements who has not had solemnly impressed upon his heart and conscience a call from God himself.

Dr. Spring, in the volume already quoted, says: "Every man who possesses the necessary qualifications and is approved and set apart to the office by the express judgment of the Church . . . is a divinely commissioned minister of Christ." If Dr. Spring intended to say that the call of God can come to any man from or through the Church without being accompanied *by any* direct operation or impression of the Spirit upon the man's own heart, or if he intended to say that the favorable judgment of the Church is enough to evince that a man is called to preach without any inward conviction produced by the Spirit within his soul, it was a great error. Many an uncalled man has had, according to the Church's judgment, all the necessary qualifications. There can be no due authentication of the call without that other element also of the inward conviction wrought by the Spirit on the heart of the called man.

The call to preach, therefore, is *direct and immediate*, in the sense that it is not given through any human agency external to the man himself. It comes directly and immediately from God, not indirectly and mediately through human testimony. It is *direct and immediate* also, in the sense that it is not given through any special truths of the word, although it is always, of course, in concurrence with the general principles and testimonies

of the word. It is also *personal and specific*; not like the general call which comes to all men to serve God in all possible ways and do all the good they can in this sinful and sorrowful world, but coming to this man in particular and requiring him to serve the Master in this one work of his life. It is, further still, *supernatural*, in the sense that it does not depend upon his possessing in himself, either naturally or by ordinary grace, the needful qualifications of body, mind, or heart, and is not derived simply from his consciousness that he does possess these powers, but that it arises from a supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost within him. And finally, it is a call of which the individual called is himself *inwardly persuaded*, so that albeit with misgivings and doubts and fears, nevertheless he is convinced by the Spirit's own witness that there is but one way of duty for him, and that is, to go and preach the gospel.

Now if the call to preach be indeed a call from God to be certified distinctly to the man's own heart by the Spirit, then it clearly follows that God's action in sending forth preachers is not to be stimulated or its fruits increased by the Church or by any other power except in two ways, revealed both of them in the Scriptures. The first is prayer to God to send forth more laborers; and the second is the use of proper means for instructing the Church and her sons on this whole subject. We may not throw wide open the door of entrance into the ministry and invite and persuade all to enter, so that those who are really called may come in with the rest. Easy, indeed, it may be for men to multiply ministers, but impossible for them to multiply such as are called of God, except by the power of prayer to the Lord of the harvest and by the force of his truth as he shall impress it upon the conscience.

It is, therefore, perfectly right and very necessary to urge upon Christian men who have the needful gifts and graces the truth that the harvest is plenteous and the laborers few. Not to the young nor to the poor is God confined in the choice of his ministers, for the call is sovereign and extends to all classes and all ages. To young men and to middle-aged men, to poor men and to rich men, therefore, who have the necessary qualifications, it

may be properly said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest," and God may cause this looking at the fields already white to be the means of impressing his call upon their minds and hearts. The Almighty is, of-course, able to call them without any human agency whatsoever, merely by his word read or preached as the Spirit shall apply it to their conscience. But the Saviour has expressly commanded us to use prayer as a means of procuring a greater supply of ministers from the Lord; and why are we not required to make all suitable exertions to get what we pray for in this case, as well as in every other? In regard to every other blessing we must pray always and trust always as though all depended on God, which indeed it does, yet we are to labor and strive in the use of means as though all depended on ourselves, which indeed it does not. We pray for the common blessings of life, but we must diligently use the proper and appointed means whilst we are praying. We pray for the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers, but we must ply them both with the word that the one class may be converted and the other edified. And whenever we meet with a man or a boy who appears to us to possess the needful gifts and graces for the ministry, why may we not bring to his mind the question, For what were these gifts and graces imparted? That question may be God's way of impressing the conviction of the call upon that individual's mind. If a church-nay signify to any man whose ministrations it is satisfied would be profitable to itself that it desires him to be its minister, and if that might legitimately be the very first step in the process of his being introduced into the ministry, why may not one Christian believer signify to such a man his sense of benefit from those ministrations as they have been hitherto privately and unofficially exercised and urge him to undertake the ministry? If sitting in my place in Presbytery I may encourage an individual to go forward, why may I not do the same in my pulpit addressing many persons together, and why may I not do it in private conversation with the particular individual? If a pious mother may in secret offer to the Lord her son for the work of the ministry because she loves the Saviour and desires for her boy the

honor of his being one of the Lord's heralds, why may she not tell that boy what a glorious thing it is to preach Christ, and why may she not set before his mind every scriptural view of that subject, and paint before his eyes the condition of millions who are perishing, and urge the necessity there is for many to carry to them the word of life?

This inward call of the Spirit is not the extraordinary call of prophets or apostles, although it is a definite, individual, and supernatural call. It is the ordinary call of God to his ministers and other office-bearers. The question arises, Must not the sin of neglecting this call be in proportion to its solemnity and importance? When God bids a man go preach and save souls and the man refuses, does not this refusal involve the deepest criminality? It follows that while it is important for ministers and those seeking the ministry to be assured of their call, the assurance that they are not resisting this call is of importance to those at ease in Zion and not coming up to the help of the Lord against the mighty. The difference between the two cases is that the one requires assurance positively, but the other negatively. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind, and that by intelligent and prayerful consideration, whether he knows his whole duty and is striving to discharge his whole duty to God and the Church and mankind. If there be danger and evil in running to one extreme of opinion, and practice in urging men to enter the ministry, there may be danger and evil in going to the opposite extreme of not faithfully instructing those who have the requisite gifts and graces concerning their duty in this regard.

Let us recapitulate. It is not of the essence of the call (1) that a man desire the work, so that he has no reluctance to enter on its duties; nor (2) that the circumstances surrounding a man be favorable to his undertaking the work; nor (3) that he be full of zeal; nor (4) that he loves preaching; nor (5) that he suppose he can be more useful in this service than in any other; nor (6) that he have the best motives within and the best outward proof, so long as he lacks the internal conviction of his own call; but yet (7) on the other hand, it is not of the essence that a man hear *any* audible voice from God out of heaven, or see any vision,

or have any extraordinary manifestations whatsoever, for the word is the only and the sufficient rule of every man's faith and practice; nor yet (8) is it essential that the candidate be of any particular age or class or training, only he must not be a *novice*.

But it is essential to the call

(1) That a man have the necessary gifts and graces; (2) that no clear obligations of duty to other persons stand in his way; and (3) that he be inwardly convinced of the Spirit that he is called to this work and to no other. The call, therefore, is personal, specific, direct, and supernatural, though it is not manifested by any extraordinary external signs whatsoever. And as it does not depend on the mere general notion that the ministry is the most useful of callings, this specific personal vocation will not vanish into thin air whenever difficulties arise, but the truly called will patiently endure, by sustaining grace, all which the call may involve. And as it is from God, man cannot stimulate its operation by any devices of his own, but only by the ordained means of prayer to the Lord of the harvest and instruction to the Church and her sons.

One more remark shall finish the discussion of this branch of the subject. It is that the very idea of a call to the ministry implies that, in a certain sense, the individual is passive. He is called by the Lord and called by the Church, and being called, he obeys the call. It is the part of enthusiasts and fanatics to thrust themselves forwards; but he that is truly called, is oftentimes loth to enter on the work and consents to come forward only when urged. Real merit is usually modest and self-distrustful, and frequently needs the encouragement of being called. Indeed, the true attitude of every candidate is not that of a volunteer asking Presbytery to examine him or license him, any more than afterwards he would ask a church to call him. From the very beginning and always to the end, the individual's proper attitude is, that, being wanted, he is called ; and being called, he answers to the call.

II. We are now prepared to take up the second element of the evidence that any man is called to preach the gospel, which is, *The desire of a congregation for his ministerial services.*

The individual's own conviction that he is called has been discussed first, but not because necessarily that element of the evidence appears and manifests itself first. It might be affirmed that, ordinarily, personal conviction does not precede, but follow the convictions of others ; but, indeed, no particular order is essential or invariable. The individual's convictions may come first, or the church's or the Presbytery's may precede them.

But whensoever these convictions of the individual emerge, they do not of themselves prove that he is called. They are essential to the evidence of a call, but a second element is likewise essential. Some church must desire his ministerial services with a desire based on their experience of his gifts and graces for the ministry. Let the man's convictions be never so clear and powerful, they are nothing unless some congregation having first tried him, express their earnest call and desire for him to undertake the pastoral office amongst them. And their promise of a competent support for him is the indispensable proof of the sincerity and earnestness of the call. Ordinations *sine titulo* have always been and are still condemned in the Church. Now, the *Titulus* of old was a church which yielded *a support* to the *In-titulatus* as well as. furnished him a field of labor. It has ever been the conviction of the Church in all ages, that a ministry not supported properly is a ministry undervalued and dishonored, and so made to be unprofitable and useless. The ground of any call which a congregation makes out is their desire for the services of the minister called, and they evince the reality and strength of this desire in what they promise to pay for his services. There lies the only real evidence that he is wanted amongst them, and from this may be judged accurately and safely how much he is wanted. It never is considered in the markets of the world that a demand for any article exists where the full and fair value of the article in question does not readily come forth to be exchanged for it. And this principle applies, in a sense, to the call of the minister-there is no call for his services where the people will not promise him at the least a fair support.

It is for the purpose of discovering whether any particular church is able and willing thus to evince a hearty desire for his

services, that we license our candidates to go and preach the gospel *as probationers for the holy ministry*. The licentiate is in no sense at all a minister of the word. His licensure is only one part of his trials. The Presbytery can withdraw it at any time, without ceremony. But whenever a people, having had experience of his ministrations, do send to Presbytery a call for the services of a probationer, then that body has before them two of the elements which evidence that that man is called of God to preach the gospel.

III. The third element of this evidence is the concurrent judgment of the Presbytery. They tried him before, and being so far satisfied, they sent him forth amongst their churches. Called now by one or more of these, the Presbytery, with solemn and anxious care, does, or ought to, try him strictly again. If satisfied, the third element of the evidence emerges, and thus at last God's call to the individual is authenticated. All these three elements do not constitute the call, for that is from the Master himself; but when these elements concur, the call of God is evinced. There is no call from God unless the man is inwardly persuaded thereof ; unless some church or churches have been edified by his labors and desire their continuance, and are willing to pay for them; and unless the Presbytery, under whose care and government both parties are, feels prepared to join them together in these sacred bands of ecclesiastical wedlock. And those bands no power on earth, except the Presbytery, can lawfully unloose again.

JNO. B. ADGER.