

ARTICLE IV.

SUCCESS IN THE MINISTRY.

The first call to the Gospel Ministry exhibits, in a striking manner, the true spirit of this work, especially with reference to the important element of success. It was given to Simon Peter, at the shore of Galilee. The Saviour had, just before, directed him to “launch out into the deep and let down the nets for a draught.” In doing this he was not unaware of the fruitless toil of the night previous, but he designed to try the spirit of his new disciple. “And Simon answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing; *nevertheless*, at thy word, I will let down the net.” This reply evinced strong confidence in Christ and a spirit of obedience to his will. The result not only justified, but also increased his confidence in the Master’s omniscience and power, and deeply impressed him with a sense of his own unworthiness. It was just as he had been brought to this point, that our Saviour gave him the promise of employing him in the Gospel Ministry,—“henceforth thou shalt catch men.” We are forced to believe that he had this *ministerial call* in view from the first of this transaction—and that he regarded the spirit of Peter’s answer as the true spirit of the ministry. He saw that the man who, after a night of fruitless, though skillful and earnest toil, was yet ready to renew that toil, simply *at his word*, was the man who would, in the labours of the Ministry, be ever ready to repeat exertions for *his* cause, even after protracted and discouraging labour, —provided only, he had the word of his Master for so doing. This incident, as we conceive, exhibits the true relation between our responsibility and our success.

It is a painful, but undoubted truth, that we are not warranted in expecting universal, even apparent success, in the employment of the means of grace. It is true God has said, that “*his* word shall *not* return unto him void,—that it *shall accomplish* that which he pleases, and *shall prosper* in the thing whereunto he sends it.”

No one can doubt that God *succeeds* perfectly and invariably in all that he really attempts. What we say is, that while the means of grace are adapted to save the souls of men, and are employed by the faithful servants of God to that end, yet neither the Bible nor experience warrants us in expecting that all, or even a large proportion, of those on whom they are brought to bear, will be saved; even when the efforts used are most Scriptural in form and most Christian and faithful in Spirit. "Many are called, but few are chosen."

However desirable it be to labour in confidence of success, and however discouraging this truth may be, to which we refer, it has, nevertheless, been realized by God's servants in all ages of the world. "Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the aim of the Lord revealed?" was the complaining and desponding inquiry of the prophet Isaiah. A similar experience was realized by many other, if not all of the prophets of the old dispensation, who seemed to "stretch out their hands all day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people." But the most remarkable fact illustrative of this truth was the want of apparent success in the ministry of our Lord. It was in anticipation of this, the prophet represents him as saying, "I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." Though "he spake as never man spake," yet how few regarded "the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth!" Though he performed so many and such wonderful miracles, yet how few were convinced of his claims. At the close of his ministry, so abundant in labours, so instructive and solemn, and faithful, so glorious and impressive in the exhibitions of Divine power; and withal so tender and persuasive in its spirit,—at the close of that ministry he was called to weep over infatuated Jerusalem, which refused, with only slight exceptions, to be gathered under his wings. And how many of God's ministers have found sad occasion to recall, for their own comfort, this remarkable example. The disproportion between the efforts employed and the results achieved has, in almost every age of the world, constituted a painful illustration of the fact of which we speak. Nearly every youthful preacher is doomed to have the buoyant

anticipation of his early ministry disappointed, as were those of the gifted and enthusiastic Melancthon. Many a Godly minister has been compelled to labour through long years of anxiety and desire, without being permitted to see the work of the Lord prosper in his hands, in the known conversion of a single soul. The distinguished Samuel Rutherford, one of the holiest and most faithful ministers of the 17th century, writes to a friend, "I see exceeding small fruit of my ministry, and would be glad to *know of one soul* to be my crown and rejoicing in the day of Christ." And even at the present day when the accessions to the church are greater than at any previous time, since the apostolic age, there are doubtless, many similar instances. Indeed, to a greater or less extent, at one period or another, every minister of Christ, and every labourer in his vineyard is called to encounter this discouraging experience,—to behold month after month, and some, year after year, of earnest and prayerful labour pass away, unrelieved by any marked indications of success in the conversion of souls. And no doubt even the most successful are ready to join in this lamentation, when they contrast the *few* who are gathered in with the multitudes who remain in the way of death.

We propose to consider this general fact as *a source of temptation to all who are enlisted in the cause of Christ*. Not only is it adapted to *test* the reality and strength of our zeal,—it is also a source of serious *danger*, leading, in some instances to injurious and in some, to disastrous results.

The *first class* of these dangers, to which we advert, arises *from improper views of the causes of this want of success*. It is not our purpose to discuss the question,—what are these causes? We take it for granted that our readers recognize the distinction between those which are *secondary* and that which is the grand, *ultimate* cause. With us there is no doubt that all the varied results of Gospel preaching and Christian effort, whether successful or unsuccessful, are to be referred to the sovereign determination of Him "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,"—and "who will have mercy on whom He will have mercy." There being in

the hearts of men, no natural nor self-originated disposition to yield to the calls of the Gospel; and neither the word, nor sacraments nor ministers of Christ, having any independent power to produce such disposition, the work of conversion must be, in the most literal sense, the work of God,—and as such, must be wrought *where* and *when*, on the persons, and to the extent which God chooses.—“So then, neither is he that planeth anything, neither is he that watereth: but God that giveth the increase.” Our Saviour referred to this very discrimination in God’s dealing with “the wise and prudent,” on the one hand, and with “babes” on the other, when he uttered the words—“Even so Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.” Here, then, we are, unquestionably, to look for the ultimate cause of both failure and success. In the one case, depraved man is left in his sins,—in the other, man, equally depraved, is made willing in the day of God’s power. We are never to forget, or undervalue this fundamental truth. It lies at the very basis of our Christianity. It is the most precious source of consolation and encouragement to the ministry and the church, and it should have a conspicuous place and a controuling influence in all our motives, efforts and anticipations.

Assuming then, that we all, habitually, ascribe our want, both of real and apparent success, to the sovereignty of God, we remark that one danger arising from this want of success, is *that of falling into a spirit of indifference*. It is one mark of that selfishness which cleaves even to the renewed mind, that our interest in any result is generally in proportion to our personal connexion with that result, either as sharing in its benefits, or as having an agency in its production. It is true the Spirit of God fires the souls of true Christians with a zeal that is both disinterested and humble—a zeal which is willing to toil for others, and especially for Christ, and to be used as the obscure and dependent instrument in the hands of the Almighty. Still, it is difficult for even the truest, humblest servant of Christ, to tell how much the fervour of his zeal, in the cause of religion, is fed by the conscious efficiency of his own exertions, and the visible success with which those exertions are crowned. Not

that we would brand all such zeal as spurious and wrong. We know not to what extent God himself may be employing this very influence, in stimulating the interest and the activity of his servants. But it is quite apparent how the withholding of success endangers the very existence of that interest, and how surely it will dampen a zeal which is not pure and strong. It is also apparent what relation there is between this influence and our views of the sovereignty of God. While our labours are successful, and souls are being converted by our instrumentality, it were easy to keep our interest alive and our zeal fervent, even while we renounce all self-reliance, and ascribe our success to the sovereign goodness and power of Jehovah. But when we seem to labour in vain and spend our strength for naught,—when no Divine influence descends upon our work,—when the ungodly remain obdurate and impenitent, and few or none are plucked as brands from the burning;—and when we realize, then, there is, after all, no power in our arm,—no intrinsic efficacy in our efforts,—that not even a zealous Paul, nor an eloquent Apollos, can of himself secure the increase, and that God is the ultimate and sovereign source of all results,—then it is that the reality and strength of our zeal are brought to the test,—then it is seen whether that zeal be truly and supremely for God, or whether it depends upon our beholding the triumphs of our own exertions,—and then it is, that, if our zeal be spurious or feeble, or if it be based on wrong convictions, it will die away into a cold indifference. A false zeal cannot endure the combined influence arising from seeing the failure of our efforts to save souls, and from ascribing that failure to the sovereign will of Jehovah. It can live and labour only while flushed with at least seeming success. But a true zeal, which burns with pious love to Christ, and with compassionate love for souls, can labour for the Master, not only amidst animating triumphs, but also amidst discouraging failures,—and that, too, even while it realizes that the sovereign will of the Master himself, withholds success. Though it has toiled through a long and dark night of discouraging exertion, it is ready for new efforts, and for harder labours, just so far, and just in such circumstances, as

the Divine *word* of the Master requires. It shall not demand even the *certainty* of future success, to enliven its fervour, or to prepare it for its toils.

The true servant of Christ has a higher end, and a more animating motive than even the prospect of success, *i.e.* to do the will—to secure the approbation of the Master. And just so long as he sees the standard of that Master advancing before him, and leading the way, he is ready to follow. He is just as willing to labour for Christ without apparent fruit as with it. He is as prompt to follow the pillar of fire by night, as the pillar of cloud by day. Such, we say, are the attributes of a pure and perfect zeal. If ours be such, then we are above the danger of which we speak. But if ours be either a weaker, or a more selfish zeal, then is it endangered by all our failures to do good; and if God sees fit to withhold success from our plans and exertions in his cause, we are exposed to the danger of becoming indifferent to the result, and to the form and fidelity of our labours, and of fortifying that indifference by taking wrong views of the sovereign agency of God. In some instances, this indifference has led to the neglect of even external labour, —taking away all stimulus to action, and inducing a state of criminal sloth. In others, it has led to what we fear is not very much better,—a careless, heartless, and merely professional discharge of external duty,—a continued use of means, without much thought as to the end, a regular employment of appointed instrumentalities, without any hope of success; between which, and an utter unbelief of God's promises, it is hard to discriminate. Against these evils, it is of the utmost importance to guard and strive, since they are at once sinful, and fatal to all future success. Just so far as God sees fit to try us by this want of success, let us recur to the grand motives for fidelity in the work of God,—our obligations, as the purchase of the blood of his Son, as his adopted children, —as his consecrated servants, —as those who have, by our own solemn and voluntary engagements dedicated our strength and time to Him.

But this suggests another form of danger arising from this same source,—that of confining our view to the ultimate cause of our want of success, and *not duly regard-*

ing those secondary causes which pertain to ourselves. God's sovereign determination seems indeed, adequate to account for all the failures of our efforts; and as a source of consolation and an argument for submission, it is ample. Yet, as we continually teach, *we* are none the less responsible for all this. We are not indeed, responsible for the actual conversion of one soul, yet we are responsible for acquiring all the mental and spiritual fitness possible, and for putting forth all the ability we have, in order to secure the salvation of men. While therefore, we turn to God's sovereignty for consolation, in view of our want of success, let us not forget that just so far as our failure is connected with our lack of industry, fidelity, and prayerfulness, to the same extent shall we be held accountable for all the ruinous consequences which ensue. Though God's Spirit alone can make our best warnings and exertions effectual, yet, failing to warn and labour as faithfully as we ought, God will require *at our hands*, the blood of neglected souls. It is the spirit and teaching of our system of truth to labour just as earnestly and to care just as anxiously for the salvation of perishing souls; as if their salvation depended exclusively upon us,—while, at the same time, we look to God for success just as dependantly and just as trustfully as if he dispensed with our instrumentality. It is this view which combines labour with faith,—a sense of personal responsibility with dependance on God,—and anxiety for success with submission to the Divine will,—the only view and the only spirit which can enable any to toil and struggle on with a loving heart, a lively zeal and an obedient mind, through all the discouragements and trials of unsuccessful, or apparently unsuccessful, labour.

But there is another extensive class of dangers arising from want of success, of a very different character, which we would describe generally, as consisting in *a departure from the word of Christ in the means and the mode of seeking after success.* The class of which we have been speaking, consists in a failure of *all earnest effort*; this is a *departure* from *those* efforts which the Master had enjoined. The cold-hearted, indifferent servant, may be willing to continue in mere outward but careless

labours of the *prescribed form*, and often justifies his course on the ground that it is *regular* and Scriptural in its method and means. The dangers of which we now speak, are no less formidable, and the evils to which they tend no less to be deprecated. The warm-hearted Minister of Christ, who loves the church and loves the souls of men, is prone to feel that visible success is the essential seal of his ministry. This conviction and this anxiety often becomes the sources of serious error, in regard both to his plans of effort and the nature of his exertions. They often beget a species of zeal which the best forms of success do not gratify, and which, in consequence, continually undervalues such forms of success, and fails to seek after them, while it pursues results which are less real, less valuable, and to some extent, hinders those which are more to be desired. We refer to that species of zeal which is *confined exclusively to the conversion of souls*. Far be it from us to utter one syllable in disparagement of an end so glorious and so holy,—an end, worthy not only of man's, not only of a seraph's zeal, but even of God's eternal purpose of redeeming love. Rather would we magnify and exalt an instrumentality having so blessed a design,—since “he that converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save his soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins,”—and “they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.” All we wish to say is, that a zeal which is confined to this one part of the work of God is a defective zeal,—that it does not, while thus partial, lead to the best results, and that by failing to have other elements, of vast importance, it often leads to serious error and to injurious results. It is, therefore, a pertinent inquiry—what is the success after which we should aspire,—to which as the ministers, officers and members of the church, we should direct our exertions?

There are results which belong peculiarly to God, which in this, as in all things, we are to seek primarily. He has instituted the church for the display of his own glory and the vindication of his own character in an apostate world. To declare and defend His truth is the first great object to be sought, and nothing which would

either thwart or hinder that, no matter how much it would seem to benefit men, is at all consistent with the grand mission and the first duty of the church. But happily, God has chosen to effect this, and in a way which, at the same time, and in the process itself, secures the highest welfare of his creatures. The first step in this great work is the conversion of souls. This lays the foundation, and is, indeed, essential to all the other parts. To aim at this as extensively as possible is indispensable to a true zeal for the cause of God,—and hence for this we should cherish an intense anxiety and desire,—for this we should pray with agonizing earnestness,—for this we should toil with unwearied exertion. We cannot, indeed, exceed the required measure of zeal for an end so benevolent and holy. Yet, by confining our zeal to this one design, we shall be led to a course of effort involving the neglect, if not the injury, of other parts of the great work. Men are not only to be converted and brought into the church,—it is the design and command of Christ that they be *edified* and built up on their most holy faith,—that they be enlightened and trained,—and that they be carried forward in a career of continual spiritual progress,—that they become more holy and more like Christ,—that they receive not only the grace of pardon, but also the grace of assurance and comfort, and joy in God, and that they be made to abound more and more in every good work. And it is by these achievements, no less than by their conversion, that God is glorified and the Saviour honoured. Herein indeed, are attained the higher ends of the church, beyond which it were impossible to seek for holier or more glorious results. It were a blessed work to toil exclusively for those who are perishing in sin,—but it were no less blessed and no less important and acceptable to God to toil for the sanctification and comfort of the ransomed of the Lord. God indeed, loves sinners. But the strongest expressions of his love refer to sinners as already redeemed, pardoned and saved,—the church which he has bought with the blood of his own son. God “the gates of Zion” with a special and distinguishing affection. The church is his peculiar treasure, on which he lavishes his choicest gifts,—on which he

bestows his most extended labours. What end, then, can be more important, and what species of success more to be coveted by the true servants of God, than the spiritual advancement,—the purity,—the consolation and highest usefulness of those who are already the children of Jehovah,—secure though they already be against eternal destruction.

And how important that the church, which is God's kingdom and representative on earth, be pure in her membership,—uncorrupted by false and deluded Professors! Is it not, then, a weighty concern of the labourers in Zion to press upon the church, as a body, such instructions, tests and appliances, as will develop the true character of all. There never was a time when it was more important that the church of God stood forth in her true character,—in the maturity of Christian knowledge,—in the strength of solid and consistent piety,—clothed in the whole armour of God, and prepared to wield with wise efficiency the weapons of a spiritual warfare. And yet there has never been a time since the reformation, when so little attention has been bestowed upon the great work of training the membership. Hence, we urge that it is a defective zeal which leaves unaccomplished, and unsought, and comparatively uncared for, this grand purpose and requirement of the Almighty. And we add, for the encouragement of those whose zeal and anxiety embrace such labours as these, that if they be successfully engaged in building up the Church of Jesus Christ in spiritual knowledge, in holiness, in the practice of family religion, in godly living, in prayerfulness, and in active usefulness,—they are doing a noble, a truly glorious work, both for God and their race, even though they are not permitted to see many converts from the world. It is not the *number* of professions, but their *consistency* which advances the Divine glory. And in view of the number of spurious conversions, there is no field of effort for the conversion of souls more important, than that which is embraced in the walls of Zion,—the conversion of self-deceived church members. And in view of the low state of piety among professed Christians generally,—the covetousness, the indolence, the prayerfulness, the spi-

ritual ignorance, the inconsistencies, the evil influence and the bad examples which abound,—we are bold to say that there is no species, no measure of success more excellent and more to be sought after than that which shall remove or diminish, perceptibly, these sore and wide-spread evils.

But what has all this to do with the danger which we ascribe to a want of success in the conversion of souls? It has at least this to do with it,—that these important and neglected departments of the great work involve more labour and anxiety, and real difficulty, than even the ingathering of converts; while at the same time, even their successful cultivation fails to afford that exciting gratification, and to produce that glow of triumphant feeling which are experienced when our labours result in the conversion of sinners. The latter form, also, counts more largely and more rapidly, and is attended with more *eclät*, both in the church and the world,—while, on the contrary, efforts to train,—to instruct, purify, elevate and edify the church by searching, preaching, and by faithful discipline, is not only a difficult, but also a slow and unpopular work, hence less inviting and less stimulating. Now, if a want of success in the conversion of sinners were to result in more diligent and faithful effort in this neglected part of the work, it would be a happy result of our failure, since it would not only lead to the noble ends of which we have spoken, but also by securing them, would lay the foundation for more extended and glorious successes in the conversion of men, than have been witnessed since the primitive days; inasmuch as it would secure, and set in motion that instrumentality, which, at the present day, is more needed than any other, —that of a holy, praying, active church, coöperating with the ministry in the salvation of a ruined world.

But, such want of success does not always result in this,—and here we come to the most serious danger of all from this source. Anxious for this species of success, and failing to secure it by such means, and in such ways as the Master prescribes, many are led to resort to other means and other modes of effort, unlawful in their origin and injurious in their results. For example, find-

ing that the Scriptural doctrines which they have been preaching are slow in their operation, and scanty in their apparent results, many have been tempted to modify their teachings, with a view to wider influence and more rapid success,—a course into which every one unblest with success, is in danger of falling. Again, finding that converts are few, when judged by the stern tests of the Bible, many are tempted to adopt a lower and a looser judgment, by which multitudes may be admitted to the church. Finding other denominations so ready and urgent to secure for themselves all reputed converts, or who are willing to profess religion, some are led,—*forced* as they feel it,—to admit to the privileges of the church persons who are untried, and thus, in many cases, by a premature profession, made a cause of scandal, and in this way, at least, recklessly expose the church to the danger of impurity. And still further, inasmuch as the use of the appointed means of grace,—preaching the word, prayer, pastoral visitation, personal exhortation and direct instruction to persons inquiring what they must do to be saved,—inasmuch as the use of these means seems slow in producing an effect, many are tempted to try other and more exciting measures,—measures which will be more rapid and extensive in their results, without regard to the character or permanency of those results,—measures which have been found to promote spurious conversions, and to be in many ways, injurious to all the best interests of religion. And in these departures, the ministry are often urged on by the membership of the church, who are apt to partake of the same impatience as to the result.

All these things, however plausible in appearance and indicative of zeal, form parts of a superficial system,—a system destitute of solid and lasting results,—a system which necessarily includes long seasons of coldness and deadness in the church, an irregular, evanescent form of piety, and the multiplication of apostates,—a system which never acts, except with the violence of spasmodic action, and which as surely tends to decay and death. These dangers are all enhanced by the numbers, zeal, and apparently superior success of rival churches, which are striving to proclaim the largest ac-

cessions and the most rapid progress. Our system is not framed for such rivalry. It professes to be governed, not by expediency or human policy, but solely by the word of Christ. It professes to adopt that extended view of the great work, which we have attempted to describe. It aims at the greatest possible *purity* of the church, rather than the greatest magnitude. It aims to glorify God, and not to be popular with men. It aims at solid, not showy results. It aims to build, not with "wood and hay, and stubble," which may be gathered in any field, and by any species of labourers; but with "gold and silver, and precious stones,"—secured with toil and care, but when secured, forming a building of strength and glory, in which God shall delight to dwell. We surely, as a denomination, *could* attain such results as are attained by others,—having, as we conceive, no superior in any of the elements of success,—provided we adopt the same system of effort. But do we desire this? Do we envy the position, the character, the influence or the success of any other church in Christendom? Why then should we ever modify our system in order to emulate their triumphs? We are fully persuaded that just so far as we have copied the measures of others, as distinguished from our scriptural means, we have contributed to impair the permanency and value of our success, and have really lost ground. It is like sewing a piece of new cloth to an old garment, and like putting new wine into old bottles. Scriptural means are best adapted to plant and extend a scriptural theology and a scriptural organization. It is not enough that many have been truly converted by unscriptural means, and by designedly periodical exciting efforts. By a more faithful adherence to the purity of our system, the regular ministrations of the word would have been more successful, the results achieved would have been more valuable, and we should, this day, have been a stronger, purer, and more useful church than we are. Who are they whose present condition illustrates our want of success in the conversion of men? In many of our communities, they are, for the most part, those who have been already operated on by the very system to which we refer,—and on whom it has spent its power only to

harden and to ruin, and to make them occasions of scandal. And many who have never professed religion, have yet, by their having been subjected to a strained system of effort, become insensible, not only to all less exciting influences, but even to the most moving appeals. Let us therefore heed the lessons of experience. Above all, let us be careful to adhere, in all our labours, to the word of our Master. "Let us not be weary in *well doing*, for in *due season* we shall reap, if we faint not. The husbandman *waiteth* for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath *long patience* for it." Doing this, we shall at least serve Christ. Doing otherwise, we have no assurance of any real success.

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