

against it. The punishment of loss, and the punishment of sense, are things which require our utmost care and concern to escape. The eternity and unchangeableness of these things, add immensely to their weight. There is no change there for ever. But once happy, happy for evermore; and once miserable, miserable for evermore. Finally, when it will come upon us, we know not. Our few years being come, then we go, and shall know in our experience what that is, about which we have so often heard so much. Amen.

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*A Sermon preached at the Ordination of Mr. ROBERT LITHGOW, at Askirk, March 7, 1711.*

A HEART EXERCISED UNTO GODLINESS, NECESSARY TO MAKE A GOOD MINISTER.

SERMON IX.

1 TIMOTHY iv. 7,

*And exercise thyself rather unto godliness.*

Two things are necessary to make a good minister of Jesus Christ; namely, sound doctrine, and a holy godly life. A good minister is one nourished up in, or with the words of faith, verse 6. He does not only hold forth the breasts of the word to others, but sucks them himself, and grows by them. The apostle will have Timothy to study a holy accuracy in both these; so to hold by the words of faith grounded on divine testimony, as to refuse all profane and old wives' fables: that is all impertinent discourses that have no foundation in the word of God, and have no tendency to the promoting either of faith or holiness. These he doth in contempt call old wives' fables, which, whether true or false, are yet unprofitable and profane; or impure and muddy, unworthy of the heavens and stars, according to the notion of the word; and therefore, as a Greek, not to be brought to the temple. In the text he calls him to the diligent study of true godliness, in which,

1. Consider the connection. And, or but exercise thyself rather unto godliness. The refusing of the one, and embracing of the other, must go together. There is an opposition betwixt the two. Such impertinences may nourish men's lusts, but cannot feed their souls in godliness. There is no suitableness in them for that end,

more than in ashes to feed our bodies. They have no word of divine appointment for that end, which though they were suitable, yet would be absolutely necessary for their efficacy; and therefore men's souls will lose by them instead of gaining. But there is a pleasant harmony betwixt the words of faith and true godliness. The words of faith are the doctrine according to godliness. There is a suitableness between them. And the words of faith have a word of divine appointment, making them the means of holiness. John xvii. 17; Rom. x. 17. Holiness again casts a divine splendour about the truths of God, to discover them in their glory. "For if a man," said our Saviour, "will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Hence the Christian's practice is, walk in the truth; and his faith of the principles of religion, is speaking the truth in love, Eph. iv. 15; which shews us, that were truth more received in the world, there would be fewer of profane lives: and were there more holy hearts exercised unto godliness, there would not be so many unsound heads.

2. The exhortation itself, which is not to be taken comparatively, as if of two good things here, exercising unto godliness were the best, but simply and absolutely. The ministers of Christ, that would be good ministers of Jesus Christ, are simply to refuse these profane and old wives' fables, and in opposition to them, to exercise themselves to godliness; to bend their studies towards the advancing of godliness in themselves, and in the people. Godliness here, comprehends the whole of religion. It is a conformity to God in the whole man. To this end we must exercise ourselves. The word properly signifies such exercise as wrestlers and runners use, to which the apostle frequently alludes; which was with all their might and skill, that they might gain the victory, being trained up to it by frequent practice. It is plain from the following verse, that the apostle opposeth the exercise unto godliness, unto bodily exercise, which denotes external exercises in religion, by which the body is exercised, but not the spirit, to its advancing in holiness; which, therefore, are not religion indeed, or godliness. Such as abstaining from certain meats, marriage, and such like things, verse 3. Man is not a mere machine, a lump of earth, and therefore godliness cannot consist in bodily exercise. He hath a soul which is his better part. It is a spirit, as God is a spirit, and religion exists there. The exercise unto godliness then, is heart exercise, soul exercise; labouring and wrestling to get the soul wrought up into a conformity to God, in holiness, which may sometimes be alone, (without bodily exercise,) acceptable unto God. But bodily exercise can never be acceptable

without it, seeing it derives all its value from the soul exercise, which spiritualizeth it. The apostle does not simply condemn bodily exercise. Men may fast, abstain from marriage, and do such things as may best contribute to the prosperity of the soul. They may, and must exercise their tongues, in praying, preaching, and the like; but in all these things they must be spiritual, exercising their hearts unto godliness, which lies inwardly.

DOCTRINE.—A heart exercised unto godliness, as it is necessary unto all; so it is especially necessary to him, that would be a good minister of Jesus Christ. In discoursing upon this, I shall,

I. Shew what this heart exercise unto godliness is.

II. The necessity of the exercise of the heart to godliness, to make a good minister of Jesus Christ.

I. I am to shew what this heart exercise unto godliness is.

1. It pre-supposeth a man to be truly godly. That professor or minister that is not godly can never exercise himself to godliness. It is impossible to act without a principle of acting, and exercise doth naturally require a power of it. He can never exercise himself to running, that wants feet to run with; or to wrestling, who wants arms; nor the ungodly exercise themselves to godliness; on the contrary, "an heart they have exercised with covetous practices." There is more haste than good speed, when men run to be leaders of the Lord's people, ere ever they have been taught to follow Christ among them. Serious men will not dare adventure on that great work, till they have examined themselves in the point of personal holiness, and had some comfortable account of themselves therein. Our very calling, supposeth us to be holy, Deut. xxxiii. 8. A slave to Satan and lusts, cannot be very meet to be a man of God, nor does it suit well to preach the words of life, with the grave cloths of an unregenerate state upon us. Where it is so, it is sad. For the minister himself, that is an awful hedge about the mountain; "Unto the wicked God saith, what hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? seeing thou hast instruction, and castest my words behind thee." It is a dreadful work to be ferrying over others, with our own backs to Immanuel's land. The conversion of every graceless man is a wonder, but the conversion of a graceless minister is a double wonder; therefore, when the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, it is added, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. There is here particular notice taken of the conversion of priests. The more frequently holy things go through men's hands, and do not make them better,

they harden them the more. It is sad also for the people. They that begin not at home, in their own breasts, to ruin the devil's kingdom, will not readily set themselves to do much execution against it abroad. And if the Lord begin a good work in a soul it is hard for people in the pangs of the new birth, to fall into the hands of those who have had no experience of these things in their own souls.

2. Making religion our business. In this the apostle gave himself a pattern to us. "Herein," says he, "do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward men." Godliness should be our great work, how to advance it in ourselves and others. Now we will make religion our business, if we take it not only by fits and starts, but make it our daily work, as men exercise themselves in their callings. That is a sad character of whom Job saith, "will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?" But see our duty as angels of the churches, Rev. iv. 8. "They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is, and is to come." The priests and Levites, in their attendance in the temple, "were to lift up their hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord." Godliness is that holy fire, which we are to watch, that it go not out at any time, in ourselves or others. For ministers or people to make religion only their sabbath-day's work is but Pharaoh's religion, to serve God when we have nothing else to do. If the heart be allowed to rove, and lie carnal all the week, no wonder that it be ill to gather for a sabbath; and that the affections be ill to kindle, that lie drenched all the week in carnal worldly things. Again, we make religion our business, if whatever our exercise be, we make godliness still the scope of it. "For me to live," says Paul, "is Christ, and to die is gain." This then, should be the scope, that all the several lines of our life and actions, may meet there as in the centre. We have many things to do as Christians, and much as ministers; but happy they, that make this the scope of all, in public and private. The most holy minister on earth, while he is feeding others with the one hand, hath need to be putting into his own mouth with the other; and it would likely do others the more good, that we had the relish of it on our souls. How sweet might our work of preaching, catechising, reading, and studying, be to us, when thus followed; not studying and preaching just for preaching's sake, but for godliness's sake: that is, in effect, for God's sake. And if in reading and meditation, we be obliged to go even without the compass of the holy ground, yet to manage it so, as to bring and consecrate the spoil to the service of the tabernacle.

3. It imports a vigorous following of it, as wrestlers and runners ply their work vigorously. The apostle will have those that serve the Lord "to be fervent in spirit;" seething hot, as the word imports; Rom. xii. 11. The word of the Lord, in Jeremiah's breast, was as a burning fire shut up in his bones. When it is thus as a fire in the heart, it will not readily die in our mouths. Though burning lips with a dead heart, is but bodily exercise that will not profit; and though it may gain credit with men, God will account of it no more than as a potsherd covered over with silver dross. It was John the Baptist's commendation "that he was a burning and a shining light." Much need have we to be lively, for our own sake, and the sake of others.

4. A resoluteness, over the belly of all opposition. "Thou, therefore," says Paul to Timothy, "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ;" we must thus act, as those who strive for the mastery. Levi will always find himself the son of the hated, if he set himself to answer his name, and set himself to join his own heart, and the heart of others to the Lord. Satan will oppose the exercise of godliness in all, but especially in ministers; because a lively minister is most likely to make a lively people, and a dead minister can scarcely fail to make a dead people. To be a little more particular, I will touch at four things.

1. We should exercise ourselves to the knowledge of these things pertaining to godliness, that we may be full of eyes, and "by reason of use, have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Therefore, "we must meditate upon these things, and give our hearts wholly to them, that our profiting may appear to all." Solomon lay down ignorant, and arose wise as an angel of God. Bezaleel and Aholiab got the art of making all manner of work and utensils for the tabernacle, in an extraordinary way from the Lord, but others behoved to learn it, and be taught by them. We must be at pains to get knowledge, and therefore give attendance to reading. We will find many books useful, but there are four, the study of which are necessary to make a good minister of Jesus Christ. These are, 1. Jesus Christ himself, who is that body of divinity which the Holy Ghost teacheth all his scholars, particularly those whom he fits for the work of the ministry. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." There is no saving knowledge of God, but in him. All is in him, not only subjectively, but objectively, "In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And

in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Ah! how foolish are they that turn over many volumes, while this lieth by neglected. "The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them; because he knoweth not how to go to the city." This the apostle resolved to make his study. "For I determined," says he, "not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Shame and blushing may cover our faces when we think on this.

The second book is that of our own hearts, ourselves. The beasts, Rev. iv. 8, were full of eyes within. It is sad when the heart is a sealed book. Three things, said Luther, make a good minister, temptation, prayer, and meditation. Temptation makes the man know his own heart, if he be attentive to observe it: for it makes characters both of grace and corruption appear. It is likely to be the best sermon that is taken out of this book, among the rest.

The third book is God's word, the Bible. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." If we would be good Christians, or good ministers, we must study this, not simply as a book of knowledge, that we may speak of the truths contained in it; but as a book of saving knowledge, that we may feel the power of the truths of it on our hearts, and may, as the original hath it, Rom. vi. 17, be delivered into that form of doctrine, as melted metal cast into a mould, comes out with the form thereof upon it.

The works of God make the fourth book. Providence is a river continually bringing down golden ore, in gathering of which much of the exercise of godliness consists. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." And it should be the exercise of ministers in particular, who are to be full of eyes before, to observe the motions of their great Master in his works as well as otherwise. The watchman that is not asleep, is supposed to see the sword coming.

2. We should be exercised in combating the lusts of our hearts, beginning the war against the devil at home. Like Paul, "we should keep our bodies under, and bring them into subjection; lest that by any means, when we have preached to others, we ourselves should be castaways." How sad will it be, if we be keepers of the vineyards of others, yet keep not our own, but let it be as the garden of the sluggard! We never want matter for this exercise; if we be secure, at any time, it is not because our foes are expelled from the house, but because we see them not, or have lost heart for the struggle.

3. We should be exercised to the performing of our duties, and that in a spiritual manner. Many are the duties of Christianity and of the ministry, and we should have that mark of sincerity, "that we have respect unto all God's commandments." We need eat no idle bread. And we must exercise ourselves to be spiritual in them all, acting from a right principle, in a right manner, for a right end. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh, shall find so doing." If these things be wanting, what we do will be but loathsome bodily exercise. What avails it though we speak with the tongue of angels, without a principle of love to God, and the good of souls. Though we should waste our lungs and whole bodies, it is of no avail, if meanwhile the base heart be swelling with pride. If our work be a sacrifice to self, the fatter the more abominable to God.

4. We should be exercised in the life of faith, without which, in vain will we attempt the other parts of the exercise of godliness. "We must live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us." I take this to be the soul's constant travelling betwixt the fulness in Christ, and the emptiness, nothingness, misery and poverty in itself. This we may take up in these two things. 1. A continual use-making of the blood of Christ, to take away our guilt, and new defilement, which we contract in every thing. The laver stood beside the altar, in which they were to wash their hands and their feet before they approached the altar, though in the morning they had bathed themselves. "Even he that is washed, still needs to wash his hands and his feet." 2. A continual use-making of the Spirit of Christ, for sanctification. The coals with which the priests were to burn incense in the temple, were to be taken from the altar of burnt-offering. And without the Spirit of Christ, we and our duties will be but a dead lump. There is a fulness of merit and spirit in him. Happy they who are exercised by faith to bring it in as a flood into their guilty and barren souls. We now proceed,

II. To shew the necessity of the exercise of the heart unto godliness, to make a good minister.

1. It is necessary to make a man faithful in his work, and to cause him take God for his party, with whom he hath to do. "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." If the fear of the Lord be not on our spirits, to counterbalance the fear of men, we cannot avoid being ensnared in unfaithfulness. But a heart exercised to godliness, will lead us on to act, as in the sight of God, whether in public or in private, that no souls perish through our default. Hence a man will not offer what cost him nothing;

because, let the people be ever so few or injudicious, he is to offer it to the Lord. He will not keep up any thing of the mind of God that may be profitable to souls, for God is his party.

2. It is necessary to give a man a sense of the weight of the work, and the worth of souls, without which he cannot be a good minister. 2 Cor. v. 9, 10. It is a weighty work. "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other, the savour of life unto life: and who is sufficient for these things?" But it will sit light on men that are not exercised to godliness, for how can we have a sense of the worth of the souls of others, if we keep not up the sense of the worth of our own souls?

3. It is very necessary to fit a man to suffer for truth. The Lord sometimes calls ministers to seal the truths which they have preached, with their blood. Such days have been, and yet may be. And a good minister must say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." But alas! how will we be able for this, if we feel not the power of truth on our own souls. The exercise of godliness has carried out some to suffer for Christ, when they could speak little for him; while many learned heads but ungodly hearts, have betrayed him.

4. It is necessary to give a man insight into the mind of God. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant." Heavenly truths appear certainly in another lustre to the exercised soul than to others. And the interruption of this exercise, will make the great things of God's law appear even as a strange thing to them, who before have tasted the sweetness of them. When the heart is sealed, the Bible will be found sealed too. If they be not sensible of it in the time, they will be sensible of it after the vail is taken away. An exercised heart is one of the best commentaries on the Bible, when the soul, upon the reading of it, can say, "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of our God."

5. To make a man one that has interest in the court of heaven. I intend not to put the exercise of godliness in the room of Christ's intercession. But sure it is, that the prayers of those who are favourites of heaven, have much influence. It is of importance to think how the prophet, to convince the priests that God was displeased with them, puts them to try their interest in the court of heaven, Mal. i. 9, "And I pray you beseech God, that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been by your means: will he regard your persons? saith the Lord of Hosts."



*Lastly*, It is most necessary to fit us for the performance of the several duties of our calling, whether in preaching, administering the sacraments, visiting families, or the sick. Our great business is to bring souls to Christ, and to preach his unsearchable riches; and the law itself must be preached still, in view to Christ, as the only way to union with God, and communion with him, and as the alone fountain of true holiness; and not to feed people with barren discourses of Christless morality. This is a great work: the apostle calls for prayers for his help in it, Col. iv. 3, 4. Much need of personal acquaintance with him, for that end. For God to reveal his Son in us, that we may preach him among the people. Alas! What hopes can we have, that the word should have weight with others, if it have none with ourselves. That is a stinging word, "But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." If they did not turn, but would go to hell, they should go with a witness. To speak powerfully in the demonstration of the Spirit, this is necessary. The heart makes the best oratory. If lusts live at peace in our own bosoms, then preaching against them in others, we will hear a voice from within to cool our zeal, saying, as David, "deal gently with the young man for my sake." But if a man be exercised in combating his own lusts, it will put an edge on his own zeal, when he comes to his own weak side. It is exercise unto godliness that makes a man speak seasonably, and to the cases of the people; and he that is most exercised about his own heart, bids fairest for opening up the hearts of others; for as face answereth to face in water, so doth the heart of one Christian to that of another. And for this very cause, are matters of exercise laid in to ministers. "God," says Paul, "comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

Let us then, my brethren, study the exercise of godliness. Let this be our great work, if we would either save our own souls, or the souls of others. This will be our only comfort in a dying hour, "that in simplicity and in godly sincerity, not by fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, holding forth the word of life;" and this will be our comfort, when we must leave our pulpits to others, and go to the tribunal of our Master. The crown of glory will be sure to such wrestlers. But

doubly miserable will we be, if while we preach to others, we ourselves be castaways.

To you, the people, I would say: 1. Embrace godliness, and be exercised unto it. It belongs to you as well as to us. You have no dispensation to be vile more than we. Ungodliness will ruin you eternally; "for without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Study to be a lively people. A dead people will do much to make a dead minister. Many a time the minister comes out to the people, in bands laid on for their sake.

2. Take kindly whatsoever is said or done by us for the advancing of godliness. It is your good the Lord's servants will seek. And true wisdom would learn you to love him best, that crosseth your corruptions most, whether in doctrine or discipline.

We are dying ministers, preaching to dying people. Other persons will shortly get our pulpits, and your seats. Let this be our joint exercise while we live, and then we will not be afraid to die.

In vain will we press men to bring forth fruit to God, while they are not married to Christ, and there is no marriage with Christ, without dying to the law. Rom. vii. 4. Dare any look God in the face with their best works, but through the veil of the flesh of Christ? Will we press men to conformity to God, and not send them for it to Jesus, "who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person," whom he sent down from heaven, that men beholding him by faith, "might be transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord." An eternal barrenness will be on our souls, if influences of grace for duty, come not from heaven; and the falling dew shall sooner make its way through the flinty rock, than influences of grace come from God to us, but through him whom the Father hath constituted the head of influences. "For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell." There can be no good fruit but what grows on this vine, John xv. 1—6. Let men otherwise exercise themselves to the greatest strictness and mortification, it will be found at length, not exercise to godliness, but to ungodliness; "seeing he that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who sent him." Amen.