

Hutchins 175

THE HOPE, JOY, AND CROWN, OF A FAITHFUL
MINISTER.

A

S E R M O N

Preached at BROADMEAD, BRISTOL,

MAY 6, 1781.

By CALEB EVANS, M. A.

Published at the Request of the Church.

*O præclarum diem, cum ad illud divinum animorum
concilium cætumque proficiscar!*

CICERO.

*Ye are come—to the general assembly and church of
the first born, which are written in heaven.*

PAUL.

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THE author of the following plain discourse, hopes that its having proved acceptable to those for whose benefit it was composed, and to whom it was addressed from the pulpit, may be considered as a presage of its future acceptance and usefulness. It is committed to the press, though drawn up as may be easily perceived without the most distant view of its publication, at the request of those to whom the author is under many obligations, and who have a right to his services. And it is his ardent prayer, that whilst it may be considered as a public memorial of the mutual affection and happiness of minister and people, the great end of it with respect to both may be abundantly answered!

BRISTOL, May 21,
1781.

A SERMON, &c.

1 THESSAL. ii. 19.

FOR WHAT IS OUR HOPE, OR JOY, OR CROWN OF REJOICING? ARE NOT EVEN YE, IN THE PRESENCE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AT HIS COMING?

THE epistle from whence these words are taken, is addressed by Paul, Sylvanus, and Timotheus, to the church of the Theffalonians. But the sentiments expressed in it are by no means such as ought, or were intended to be confined to the Theffalonians only, but are equally applicable to other churches and other ministers. And O how happy must it be, for any of the ministers of Christ to be able to speak of those to whom they minister, as the apostle and his colleagues here speak of the Theffalonians! For our gospel, say they, ver. 5, came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost,

Ghost, and in much assurance, (ye had no manner of doubt of the truth of it;) as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost, so that ye were ensamples to all them that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. And what a happiness it is when the ministers of Christ are able to appeal to God, and to the consciences also of those amongst whom they have labored, with respect to their own fidelity and zeal, as these good men here appeal to the Thessalonians! Ye are witnesses, say they, ver. 10; and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably we behaved ourselves amongst you that believe: As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you to his kingdom and glory. And we may observe from what follows, what it was that gave the apostles the greatest satisfaction in their ministry, and which gives the greatest satisfaction to all the faithful ministers of Christ: see ver. 13. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, (ye did not take it upon trust or receive it merely upon our authority,) but, as it is in truth,
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the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe. How endearing and delightful the connection which is hereby formed betwixt the faithful ministers of Christ and his believing people! No wonder their hearts are united together in Christian affection, as the hearts of Paul and his brethren evidently appear to have been united to the church of the Thessalonians. Being affectionately desirous of you, this is their language, ver. 8, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. And ver. 17. We brethren, say they, being taken from you for a short time, (probably by the violence of persecution) in presence, not in heart, endeavored the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again, but Satan, (by his emissaries,) hindered us. Then come in the pathetic words first read. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming? It follows, For ye are our glory and joy.

In attempting an improvement of this subject, we are naturally led to consider

I. When christian professors may be styled the hope, the joy, and the crown of rejoicing of their faithful ministers? And

II. The

II. The solemn season in which they shall be eminently so. In the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

I. When may christian professors be styled the hope, the joy, and the crown of rejoicing of their faithful ministers? And may we not answer,

1. When they appear to be truly converted to God.

Not when they appear splendid and gay, when the world smiles upon them, and they bid fair to become great. No; outward greatness is too often productive of inward leanness and barrenness; and the church of God in the present state always thrives best in the valley of humiliation and affliction. The sunshine of worldly prosperity too often proves scorching and withering to the graces of the christian life. And can it be any pleasure to a christian minister to have a rich, a gay people, if they are not a godly people? It certainly cannot, till he is become himself as carnal as they. Brethren, we wish you outward prosperity, if it please God to give it you with a blessing, to sanctify it to you, and to add no sorrow to it: but the first and principal thing we are concerned about is your inward spiritual prosperity. In your worldly intercourses one with another, all you have to attend to is the state of one another's circumstances; who are and who are not, in the
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sense of the world, good men, or responsible. All the Physician has to attend to is the state of your bodies, whether they are healthy or sickly. But your ministers have to do with your souls, with your state godward, and that which alone can give them pleasure is to see that your souls are in health and prosper. They travail in birth for you till they see Christ formed in you the hope of glory. They do not measure their respect and affection for you according to your outward appearance and circumstances, but according to the apparent state of your souls. Their first enquiry is, whose image and superscription? Is this soul dead or alive? converted, or unconverted? Is this professor, and the other professor, a real saint, a genuine christian; or only a painted hypocrite, a sounding brass, a tinkling cymbal, having a name to live, but being really dead?

Your circumstances, my honored friends, at this time, naturally lead me to recommend to you a serious enquiry as to this matter. You are a professed church of Christ. You have lately been deprived of your honored and beloved pastor who for many years had the care of you in the Lord. You have given an affectionate invitation to his surviving colleague to succeed him in that important character. Now upon such an occasion you are naturally led not only to take a review of your numbers and outward circumstances,
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but especially to take a view of your spiritual state and circumstances; and the minister who is called to take the oversight of you in the Lord is in a very particular manner led to do the same. Every faithful minister of Christ is ready to adopt the language of the apostle: What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye? Ye to whom we minister, ye amongst whom we labor in word and doctrine, ye for whose souls we watch as those that must give an account? As though he had said, All our comfort, all our happiness both here and hereafter depends under God, upon you.

But when are a people indeed the hope and joy and crown of rejoicing of their ministers? Why not as we have seen, meerly when they are rich and great in the world, unless they are also rich in faith and good works; nor meerly when they are numerous. It is certainly very pleasing to see the visible church of Christ enlarged, to have the numbers of the faithful increased; it seems to be a kind of prelude to the glory of the latter day, when all the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ, or to the still greater glory of the church of God in heaven, which shall be composed of a number no man shall be able to number. But however large and numerous a society may be, little pleasure will arise hence to a godly minister, unless this
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number be composed of living converted souls, of such as have the root of the matter in them, and have not only a name to live, but are really alive. The privileges of the gospel are compared to a feast, and the servants of Christ are directed to invite the guests to this feast, saying, Come, for all things are now ready. Yea they are commanded to compel men to come in that his house may be filled. But would it give, think ye, any pleasure to the Master of the feast, or to the servants employed by him, to have his table furrounded by a number of ghastly dead corpses? Could such guests as these be the glory and joy of any one; or must they not rather be a grief and reproach to him? What then are ye? Let each one be ready to say to himself, What am I? I am an external member of the church of Christ, but am I an internal, spiritual member, a member of Christ's mystical body? Am I truly converted to God? Have I passed from death to life? Am I born from above? Is there a new nature imparted to me; new principles implanted in me? Do I really hate sin and love holiness? Do I renounce all self-confidence, and rejoice in Christ Jesus as my only and compleat Savior? Am I religious at heart? Is my heart right with God? Does he that knows the heart and knows all things, know that I love him, that I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of
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him, and that I may be found in him? Then it is and then alone, that a professing people are the hope and joy of their ministers, when they evidently appear to be a truly converted people, and to have religion at heart. Then it is that a real union is formed, and true spiritual communion enjoyed. My dear friends, what is the chaff to the wheat; what is the shadow without the substance; the name without the reality? There can be no natural enjoyment without natural life, and how, think ye, can there be any spiritual enjoyment without spiritual life? Are you then, or are you not spiritually alive? Are you in a spiritual sense dead corpses, or are you living souls? Are your names enrolled, not merely in the records of this part of the visible church on earth, but are they written in the book of life in heaven? Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? Again

2. When a professing people grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then are they the hope, the joy, and crown of their ministers.

This appears to have been the case with the Thessalonians in an eminent manner: for we not only read in the first epistle addressed to them, that the gospel came to them not in word only
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but also in power; but in the second epistle, chap. 1. ver. 3. We are bound, says the apostle, to thank God always for you brethren as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly. The church of God is sometimes compared to a garden, a garden enclosed: Now what is more desirable in a garden, than to see the various plants and flowers that may be placed in it grow and advance to maturity? And is it not the duty and privilege of the professing people of God, to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish it is said, in the courts of their God, yea they shall bring forth fruit unto old age, they shall be fat and flourishing. What pleasure can we take in a garden if the plants that are planted in it do not grow and thrive, but on the contrary wither, languish and decay? And what pleasure can a minister derive from his connection with a church of Christ, if the members of that church do not grow; grow in spiritual knowledge, the knowledge of the things of God, and the knowledge of their own hearts; grow in spiritual experience, an experience of the power of the gospel, its power to relieve their consciences, to purify their hearts, and inspire them with joy and peace in believing; in a word, if they do not grow in faith, in love, and universal holiness? O that you my friends of this congregation,

gregation, may thus grow and thrive in the things of God and religion ! So will you be the joy and comfort of those who may minister to you, and the crown of their rejoicing, in the day of the Lord Jesus. Permit me then, though it be in a measure from selfish motives, from a regard to my own comfort and happiness, yet as you are also deeply interested in it, permit me earnestly to entreat you, in the diligent and faithful use of the means of grace, to grow in grace, to advance in the divine life, to go on unto perfection. This we wish, wish above all things, even your perfection. We long to see you become in the divine life stronger and stronger. Do not rest in a mere profession, or in merely keeping up the external credit of your profession ; but let it be your concern to experience more and more of the true spirit, and power, and pleasure of it in your hearts. Let the same mind be in you which was in the great apostle of the Gentiles, who sets himself before believers as an example for their imitation in the following spirited manner. See Phil. iii. 12. " Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect ; as though he had said, I am far from thinking so,"—but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that, for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things
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which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He then adds, Let us therefore as many as be perfect, that is truly converted and desirous of going on unto perfection, be thus minded ; that is, not count that we have apprehended, but press forwards towards the mark. You should set no bounds to your divine attainments, but in knowledge, in faith, in love, in holiness, we would still speak to you as Moses was commanded to speak to the Israelites, that you go forward, still advancing, still reaching forth and pressing towards the mark, till your Master's voice from amidst the angelic throng shall rejoice your inmost hearts, saying to you, Come up hither ! The language of your ministers is, What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing ? Are not even ye ? But how can you be truly so, unless you are growing, thriving christians ?

3. Then may a professing people be considered as the hope and joy and crown of their ministers when they walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, and abound in the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.

When the apostle Paul was a prisoner at Rome and knew not whether he should ever see the members of the church at Ephesus any more till
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he met them at the bar of God, he addresses the following pathetic exhortation to them. Eph. iv. 1. I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. And what more suitable exhortation can be addressed to you my friends upon the present occasion? Would you indeed be the hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing, of him whom you have now invited to take the charge of you in the Lord: surely then it cannot but be your earnest concern to receive the word of exhortation, and under the influence of divine grace to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.

Remember, religion should be considered by you as your vocation, your business, the most important business you have to attend to. And if you expect to thrive and prosper in this business, you must mind it, you must attend to it, or as the apostle elsewhere expresses it, be diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. If many christians attended to their worldly business in that poor cold heartless manner in which they attend to religion, would they prosper, would they go forward in the world? No; but they would soon come to poverty and ruin. And what is said of Christian professors who instead of going forward in the ways and things of God and religion, instead of holding on their way, and enduring to
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the end, draw back? Is it not said, that they draw back unto perdition? The righteous it is said, shall hold on his way; but if we do not hold on our way, what have we to do with the privileges or promises of the righteous? The privileges and promises of God's people are all designed to encourage and strengthen them in duty, not to make them easy in the neglect of it. Too many evidently consider religion as an occasional thing, rather than as their proper stated business, and no wonder therefore they make no greater progress in it, and derive no more advantage or pleasure from it. But let us remember, my friends, that religion is our business, our vocation, and that whatever others do, it is incumbent upon us to serve the Lord.

Religion is the vocation wherewith we are called. We are called by the word, the ministers, the grace and spirit of God; called to be saints, called with this vocation, this high calling, called according to God's purpose. Called to serve and honor God here, to shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life; and called to serve God, and enjoy his presence and favor in heaven for ever. Think then my fellow christians when you are tempted to act an unsuitable part, that you are called to be saints, called to be christians, and that it is therefore in every view highly unbecoming in you, in any respect to neglect or be
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indifferent about that grand business to which you are called. Your language when tempted to sin, should be that of Joseph;—How shall I do this great evil and sin against God? I, that have been called by his grace, called out of darkness into marvellous light, out of bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God; called from death to life, from the service of sin to the service of God; called to run the race set before me, and to press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling in Christ Jesus: I cannot, I dare not do it.

If professing christians would indeed be the hope and joy and crown of their ministers, it should be their concern and earnest desire in the strength of divine grace to walk worthy of that high vocation wherewith they are called.

As there is a propriety of behavior suited to persons of every other rank and character, so there most certainly is a peculiar propriety of behaviour suited to those who sustain the christian profession and character. A mechanic is not expected to behave in every respect as a superior tradesman, nor a tradesman to emulate the appearance and state of a nobleman. There is a certain line of conduct, the observation of which, according to our different stations, tends to exalt our respective characters. In other words, there is a certain kind of behaviour which may be considered as worthy the vocation wherewith we are called.

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And this, this my friends, is what the ministers of Christ earnestly wish you to attend to with respect to that vocation, that high and holy vocation wherewith you are called. And it is your privilege, your highest interest as well as most incumbent duty so to do.

Permit me then to remind you this evening,

1. Of that conduct which is worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with respect to the duties of the closet.

For a christian seldom or ever to retire and converse with God and his own heart, is as great a contradiction as for a tradesman seldom or ever to be in his shop, or the merchant in his accounting house. Is religion the business of the Christian, and has he no affairs to transact with God in secret? How absurd the supposition! The chief business of the christian is betwixt God and the soul. And this business cannot be carried on amidst the din of perpetual dissipation and hurry, but requires solitude and calm retirement. It is when a man through desire separates himself, at convenient seasons, from the noise of the world, that he seeketh and intermeddeth with that heavenly wisdom, the merchandize whereof is better than that of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. A merchant or tradesman that was never to trouble himself about the state of his accounts and business, might as reasonably expect to prosper in

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his worldly affairs, as the christian that neglects the duties of the closet expect to prosper in the affairs of his soul and religion. And would the merchant or tradesman that acted in such a manner be considered as walking worthy of the vocation wherewith he was called? Certainly he would not; nor can the christian be considered as walking worthy of his vocation, who neglects the important and delightful duties of the closet. Let me then my dear friends earnestly recommend it to you to be much alone, to be instant in prayer, to pray without ceasing, that is morning and evening, like the morning and evening sacrifice under the law, to read the word of God, to meditate upon it, to search and try your own deceitful hearts by it, and to beg of God to search and try them. Humble yourselves daily before him, confess your sins to him, plead the promises of his love, the blood and righteousness of your dear Redeemer, your elder brother, wrestle with him, pour out your hearts before him; in a word, draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Declensions in religion generally begin at the closet door: nor can any thing be more unworthy of the christian profession and character than a neglect of the duties of retirement. A prayerless christian is as great a contradiction as a breathing statue. Were we more in the mount of communion with God, our faces would shine, our tem-

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pers, our lives would shine more than they do, and it would be evident to all around us that we had been with Jesus and learned of him. It is certainly owing very much to the neglect of the secret duties of the closet, that there is no more of the power and pleasure of the divine life experienced by professing christians. If professors were but as constant and earnest in their closets, as they are in their pursuits of the world, O what bright illustrious characters would they be, and how would they gloriously adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour!

2. Let us consider the behaviour that is suited to the christian character in the family.

Are we heads of families, surely then we cannot walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, if we do not command our households after us to keep the way of the Lord. Is it suitable to the character of christian families to be like heathen families that call not upon God's name, and upon whom the Lord hath declared he will pour out his fury? And yet are there not many such families amongst christian professors? But surely this is not walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called, but greatly dishonoring our christian character. The language of the christian should be, not only, as for me, but also, and my house, my children, my servants, my domesticks of every rank, we will serve the Lord: we will

daily

daily call upon his name together, read his word, and as a family seek his blessing. And such families, for the most part, how happy are they! They are nurseries for the church of God, they are nurseries for heaven. Or, if professing christians are only servants in the families to which they belong, there is a meek, humble, diligent conduct and behaviour incumbent upon them, by which their christian characters may be greatly adorned.

3. Let us consider the conduct that is ornamental to the christian character, in the church of God.

And here we may very naturally consider the conduct of professing christians with respect to their minister, and with respect to one another.

It is undoubtedly the duty of Christians to love all the faithful ministers of Christ without exception, but particularly those who may be set over them in the Lord. They are set over you by your own desire and request, and should therefore be highly esteemed in love by you, for their work's sake. And this sincere cordial love to them will lay an effectual foundation for the discharge of all the other duties you owe them. Such as, for instance, to pray for them; to pray earnestly and affectionately that the Lord would assist, strengthen and bless them, that his grace may be sufficient for them, and that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified as ministered by them. When a
people

people do not thus pray for their minister, what love can they have for him as a minister, or how can they expect a blessing from the word dispensed by him? Brethren, says the apostle, pray for us. As though he had said, whatever you forget concerning us, do not forget to pray for us. For my own part I can truly say I esteem it one of the most valuable expressions of the love of a fellow member, to pray for me. Your ministers need your prayers, they desire your prayers, and to deny or withhold from them this privilege is unkind and cruel, nor can those who do so be said to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. You should also know those that labor amongst you. Their persons you cannot but know, but more than this is intended. You should know them under their various afflictions and trials, affectionately sympathizing with them, and bearing their burdens for them. And in enumerating the duties of a people to their minister, I cannot avoid mentioning, your doing what you can, as you have ever been abundantly ready to do, to provide for him honorably and comfortably. A minister may waive this right to an honorable support where the people have not an ability adequate to it, or if providence hath otherwise provided for him, he may devote a part or the whole of his income as a minister to the purposes of benevolence and hospitality; but a people can never be
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excused from the faithful discharge of this duty, according to their ability, since it is GOD himself, and not man that hath ORDAINED that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. It is also the duty of christians to submit themselves to those that have the rule over them in the Lord. See Heb. xiii. 17. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls as those that must give an account. Though the ministers of Christ are by no means to have dominion over the faith or consciences of their people, yet they certainly ought to have the rule over them in the Lord; and whilst they preside in the discipline of the house of God in a manner agreeable to his word, it is the duty of the people to submit to them. And finally, it is the duty of professing christians to attend upon the ministration of the word and ordinances by their minister. Have they voluntarily called him to preach the word to them, and is it therefore his duty at the appointed seasons to do it? Surely then it must be their duty, if able to attend, to be present to hear the word preached by him. Is it his duty to instruct them; it must then be their duty to be instructed by him. And so with respect to all the duties incumbent upon a minister, they suppose and imply reciprocal corresponding duties incumbent upon the people. A christian professor that walks in this respect worthy of his
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christian vocation, will be regular, constant and serious, in his attendance upon the means of grace in the society to which he may have particularly given himself up according to the will of God, and as he desires to be himself strengthened, so will he endeavor to strengthen the heart and hands of his minister in the work to which he is called. Upon the whole, then does a christian walk worthy of his vocation with respect to his minister, when he esteems him highly in love for his work's sake, and that love expresses itself in such ways and methods as prove it to be genuine and sincere. And this love I may observe will cover a multitude of imperfections. Ministers are men of like passions with others; and as it is their duty to bear with the weak and the froward amongst their people, so should the people be ready, if need be, to bear with them. Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father.

With respect to the behavior of christian professors in the church one to another, whether they are officers, deacons in the church, or only private members, they have particular directions given them for their conduct in the word of God, to which it is happy both for themselves and those connected with them, when they are enabled to attend. In the general, it is the duty of fellow members to love one another, to bear one another's burdens, to put away all clamor and bitterness,

and wrath, and anger, and evil-speaking, with all malice, and to be kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ sake hath forgiven them, to prefer one another in love, and to provoke one another unto love and good works. In a word, to be followers of God as dear children, and to walk in love as Christ also hath loved them and given himself for them; with all lowliness and meekness, as the apostle expresses it, Eph. iv. 2, 3, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, and endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace: till they all come, see ver. 13, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; from whom, as it follows, ver. 16, the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love. Blessed are those servants, it may be truly said, whom their Lord when he cometh shall find so doing! Blessed are those servants, who whether in a private or public station in the house of God, shall be found thus walking in the church militant, worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, for surely an abundant entrance shall be ministered

ed unto them into the church triumphant. But it will be proper to consider,

4. The behavior that is suitable to the christian character, in the world.

Too many when they are in the world, entirely forget that they are Christians, or at least that they profess to be so. But can it be walking worthy of our vocation as christians, to be unjust, fraudulent, oppressive, profane, vain and impious? To run into all the gayeties and amusements of a dissipated age? No, Sirs, we are to remember that if we are christians indeed we are not of the world, but called out of it, and should take care therefore to keep ourselves from being spotted and defiled by it, and that we be not conformed to it in any of its sinful practices and ways. There are some worldly men, who with respect to their behavior in the things of the world might well put to the blush many professed christians. O my friends, let me entreat you never to forget your christian character and profession. We do not expect you to be always alike grave, every thing is beautiful in its season; we do not expect you to be always reading, or always praying, or always hearing the word of God; but we do expect you, and we most tenderly intreat and beseech you always to remember you are christians. When you mix with company, said Plato to his disciples, to preserve yourselves

from acting below the dignity of your characters as philosophers, let each one often repeat to himself, " I am a philosopher." And with how much greater propriety should the christian be ever ready to say to himself, " I am a Christian." What greater, what nobler, what more honorable and important character can there be? " It is the highest style of man." And yet alas, how often is it debased and dishonored by its professors! Shall it be so by you my friends of this community? I hope, I trust it will not, but that your light will so shine before men, that others seeing your good works will be led to glorify your father who is in heaven.

The external walk and behavior of professing christians is of the greatest consequence not only to their own comfort, but to the honor and glory of God, and the happiness of all around them. For though real religion includes a great deal more in it than meer morality, yet there can be no true religion without morality, and it is by our outward moral conduct and behaviour that our religious characters must be judged of. The world around us cannot see our hearts, but they can see our lives. They can see whether a man be just and honest in his dealings, sober and temperate, humble and benevolent, delighting to do good, and to communicate to the utmost of his power to those that need his assistance; or whether he be covet-

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ous, proud, intemperate, dishonest. Whether we are good or bad parents, good or bad children, good or bad husbands or wives, masters or servants; in a word, whether in the several connections in which we stand we do more than others, as may be justly expected from our profession and character, or whether, whilst in words we profess to be the Lord's, in works we deny him. Our servants and those around us can easily see whether we worship God in our families, or live as others that make no profession of religion, without God in the world. It may be easily seen, and it is often seen and observed by more than we are aware of, whether we are constant and steady in our attendance on the means of grace, and appear to love the habitation of God's house and the place where his honor dwelleth, embracing with pleasure every opportunity that is in our power for that purpose; or whether we appear to slight the means of grace and to make light of them. Whether we appear to love one another, and to provoke one another unto love and good works, or to be full of secret envyings, as alas is too often the case, and jealousies one against another. Whether, like Diotrephes, each one is striving for the pre-eminence, or in honor ready to prefer one the other. A society of professing christians really converted to God, and acting in character, filling up the duties of their respective stations, walk-

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ing worthy of their high vocation, and by their behavior in the closet, in the family, in the church, and in the world, adorning the doctrine of God their Savior in all things, united firmly together in love to Christ and love to one another, striving together for the faith and practice of the gospel, bearing one another's burdens, sympathizing with one another under their various afflictions and so fulfilling the law of Christ, praying with and for one another, and being ready to do all in their power to promote one another's comfort and edification: how venerable, how pleasing a sight! Who can help exclaiming with Balaam, when he beheld Israel abiding in their tents according to their tribes, How goodly are thy tents O Jacob, and thy tabernacles O Israel! I have no greater joy says the good old apostle John, than to see my children walk in the truth. And now we live, says Paul, if ye stand fast in the Lord. And, in his epistle to the Philippians, ch. 4, ver. 1. Therefore my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, dearly beloved. And in the words of our text, For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? Which leads us to consider as was proposed in the

II. Place. The solemn season in which such a professing people as has been described, shall be eminently

eminently the hope and joy and crown of their ministers. In the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming.

The great event to which true Christians have constant respect, and in the habitual view of which they desire to live, is the coming of Christ; his second coming, his coming to judge the world in righteousness, to be admired in his saints and glorified in all them that believe. Our conversation, or citizenship as it might be rendered, Phil. iii. 20, is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body and fashion it like his own glorious body. We must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ: Ministers and people, high and low, rich and poor without distinction. And at this important period, when the trumpet shall sound, the Judge descend, and the dead be raised; when he who once appeared in a state of outward meanness and infamy, shall come to judge the world in all the pomp of celestial majesty and glory: How awful will the meeting be around his bar, of those myriads of myriads that shall be assembled there! There my dear friends, you must meet with your former ministers who have gone in and out before you, watched over you, and broke the bread of life to you: There you must meet with him that now addresses you, and there, he expects to meet with you. But what sort of a meeting will it be?

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Will it be a joyful or a sorrowful one? Will your ministers meet you there with joy, or grief? Will they meet you there on the right-hand of the judge, or on the left? Will they meet you there, amongst those to whom it shall be said, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world! Or will they behold any of you amongst those unhappy wretches to whom it shall be said, Depart from me, I know ye not, ye workers of iniquity! Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting burnings prepared for the devil and his angels?

What is our hope in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at this his awful final coming, but that we shall meet you on the right-hand of the Judge, amongst those that shall be owned and acknowledged by him as his faithful servants? We hope that you will then not be found wanting, but found in him who is the life and salvation of those that trust in him, found vitally united to him, savingly interested in him. What is our hope? What is the great object of it: are not even ye? Yes, ye are our hope: our hope centers in you, and your everlasting salvation can alone fulfil it.

And what is our joy? What is our joy now: are not even ye? Yes, as far as you appear to be real christians, truly converted to God, growing in grace, walking worthy of your high vocation, adorning your christian profession, and abounding
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in the fruits of righteousness, ye are our glory and joy. And will ye not be our joy in the day of the Lord Jesus? Shall we not then meet you, with transports of delight that cannot be described! O who can conceive the joy that shall arise in the hearts of faithful ministers, when they shall meet those to whom they ministered the word of life, and for whom they travailed in birth to see Christ formed in them; when they shall meet them at the right-hand of the Judge, partaking of his blissful smiles, and welcomed into his everlasting joy!

What, what is this but the crown of their rejoicing; that which completes their joy, exalts it to its noon-tide point, and gives the rivet of eternity! Next to their own salvation, what can rejoice them more, than to be the happy witnesses of the salvation of those, who by their instrumentality were brought to the knowledge and enjoyment of such an immense privilege.

But should there be any of you then found at the left hand, what agonies will rend your guilty souls, and where, oh where will you fly, to hide your confusion or escape your inevitable doom? I can only add, Brethren, my heart's desire, and fervent unfeigned prayer to God for every one of you, is that you may be saved; and be my hope, and joy, and crown of rejoicing, as well as of other ministers who have heretofore dispensed the word of life unto you, in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming!

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