

The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry, 1740

From Gilbert Tennent. *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry, Considered in a Sermon on Mark VI. 34.* Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1740

Mark VI. 34.

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much People, and was moved with Compassion towards them, because they were as Sheep not having a Shepard.

As a faithful Ministry is a great Ornament, Blessing, and Comfort, to the Church of God; even the feet of such Messengers are beautiful: So on the contrary, an ungodly Ministry is a great Curse and Judgment: These Caterpillars labour to devour every green Thing.

There is nothing that may more justly call forth our saddest Sorrows, and make all our Powers and Passions mourn, in the most doleful Accents, the most incessant, insatiable, and deploring Agonies; than the melancholy Case of such, who have no faithful Ministry! This truth is set before our Minds in a strong Light, in the Words that I have chosen now to insist upon; in which we have an account of our Lords Grief, with the Causes of it.

We are informed, That our dear Redeemer was moved with Compassion towards them. The Original Word signifies the strongest and most vehement Pity, issuing from the innermost Bowels.

But what was the Cause of this great and compassionate Commotion in the Heart of Christ? It was because he saw much People as Sheep having no Shepherd. Why, had the People then no Teachers? Oh yes! They had heaps of Pharisee-Teachers, that came out, no doubt after they had been at the feet of *Gamaliel* the usual Time, and according to the Acts, Canons, and Traditions of the Jewish Church. But notwithstanding of the great Crowds of these Orthodox, Letter-learned and regular Pharisees, our Lord laments the unhappy Case of that great number of People, who, in the Days of his Flesh, had no better Guides: Because that those were as good as none (in many Respects) in our Saviours Judgment. For all them, the People were as Sheep without a Shepard.

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Natural Men have no Call of GOD to the Ministerial Work, under the Gospel-Dispensation.

Isnt it a principal part of the ordinary Call of GOD to the Ministerial Work, to aim at the Glory of GOD, and, in Subordination thereto, the Good of Souls, as their chief Marks in their Undertaking that Work? And can any natural Man on Earth do this? No! no! Every skin of them has an evil Eye; for no cause can produce effects above its own Power. Are not wicked Men forbid to meddle in Things sacred? *Ps. 50. 16. But unto the wicked, GOD saith, What hast thou to do to declare my Statutes, or that thou*

shouldst take my Covenant in thy Mouth? Now, are not all unconverted Men wicked Men? Does not the Lord Jesus inform us, *John 10. 1. That he that entreth not by the Door into the Sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other Way, the same is a Thief and a Robber?* In the 9th v. Christ tells us, That *He is the Door*; and that *if any Man enter in by him, he shall be saved, by him*, i.e. By Faith in him, says *Henry*. Hence we read of a *Door of Faith*, being opened to the Gentiles. *Acts 14. 27*. It confirms this Gloss, that Salvation is annexed to the Entrance before-mentioned. Remarkable is that Saying of our Saviour, *Matth. 4. 19. Follow me, and I will make you Fishers of Men*. See, our LORD will not make Men Ministers, 'till they follow him. Men that do not follow Christ, may fish faithfully for a good Name, and for worldly . . . ; but not for the Conversion of Sinners to God. Is it reasonable to suppose, that they will be earnestly concerned for others Salvation, when they slight their own? Our LORD reprov'd *Nicodemus* for taking upon him the Office of instructing others, while he himself was a stranger to the New Birth, *John. 3. 10. Art thou a Master of Israel, and knowest not these Things?* The Apostle *Paul* (in *1Tim. 1. 12.*) thanks GOD for counting him faithful, and putting him into the Ministry; which plainly supposes, That GOD Almighty does not send Pharisees and natural Men into the Ministry: For how can these Men be faithful, that have no Faith? Its true, Men may put them into the Ministry, through Unfaithfulness, or Mistake; or Credit and Money may draw them, and the Devil may drive them into it, knowing by long Experience, of what special Service they may be to his Kingdom in that Office: But God sends not such hypocritical Varlets. Hence *Timothy* was directed by the Apostle *Paul*, to commit the ministerial Work to faithful Men. *2 Tim. 2. 2*. And do not these Qualifications, necessary for Church-Officers, specified *1.Tim. 3. 7,8,9,11. & Tit. 1.7,8*. plainly suppose converting Grace? How else can they avoid being greedy of filthy Lucre? How else can they hold the Mystery of Faith in a pure Conscience, and be faithful in all Things? How else can they be Lovers of Good, sober, just, holy, temperate? . . .

All the Doings of unconverted Men, not Proceeding from the Principles of Faith, Love, and a new Nature, nor being directed to the divine Glory as their highest End, but flowing from, and tending to Self, as their Principle and End; are doubtless damnably wicked in their Manner of Performance, and do deserve the Wrath and Curse of a Sin-avenging GOD; neither can any other Encouragement be justly given them, but this, That in the Way of Duty, there is a Peradventure or Probability of obtaining Mercy.

And natural Men, wanting the Experience of those spiritual Difficulties, which pious Souls are exposed to, in this Vale of Tears; they know not how to speak a Word to the Weary in Season.

Their Prayers are also cold; little Child-like Love to God, or Pity to poor perishing Souls, runs thro their Veins.

Their Conversation hath nothing of the Saviour of Christ, neither is it perfumed with the Spices of Heaven. They seem to make as little Distinction in their Practice, as Preaching. . . .

If it be so, That the Case of those, who have no other, or no better than Pharisee-Teachers, is to be pitied: Then what a Scrole and Scene of Mourning, and Lamentation, and Wo, is opened! Because of the Swarms of Locusts, the Crowds of Pharisees, that have as covetously as cruelly, crept into the Ministry, in this adulterous

Generation! . . .

If the Ministry of natural Men be as it has been represented; Then it is both lawful and expedient to go from them to hear Godly Persons. . . .

To bind Men to a particular Minister, against their Judgment and Inclinations, when they are more edified elsewhere, is carnal with a Witness; a cruel Oppression of tender Consciences, a Compelling of Men to Sin: For he that doubts, is damnd if he eat; and whatsoever is not of Faith, is Sin. . . .

To trust the Care of our Souls to those who have little or no Care for their own, to those who are both unskillful and unfaithful, is contrary to the common Practice of considerate Mankind, relating to the Affairs of their Bodies and Estates; and would signify, that we set light by our Souls, and did not care what became of them. For if the Blind lead the Blind, will they not both fall into the Ditch? . . .

I would conclude my present Meditations upon this Subject, by Exhorting

All those who enjoy a faithful Ministry, to a speedy and sincere Improvement of so rare and valuable a Privilege; lest by their foolish Ingratitude the Righteous GOD be provokd, to remove the Means they enjoy, or his Blessing from them, and so at last to expose them in another State to Enduring and greater Miseries. For surely, these Sins, which are committed against greater Light and Mercy, are more presumptuous, ungrateful, and inexcusable; there is in them a greater Contempt of GODs Authority, and Slight of his Mercy; those Evils do awfully violate the Conscience, and declare a Love to Sin as Sin; such Transgressors do rush upon the Bosses of GODs Buckler, they court Destruction without a Covering, and embrace their own Ruin with open Arms. And therefore according to the Nature of Justice, which proportions Sinners Pains, according to the Number and Heinousness of their Crimes, and the Declaration of divine Truth, you must expect an inflamed Damnation: Surely, it shall be more tolerable for *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, in the Day of the LORD, than for you, except ye repent.

And let gracious Souls be exhorted, to express the most tender Pity over such as have none but Pharisse-Teachers; and that in the Manner before described: To which let the example of our LORD in the Text before us, be an inducing and effectual Incitement; as well as the gracious and immense Rewards, which follow upon so generous and noble a Charity, in this and the next State.

And let those who live under the Ministry of dead Men, whether they have got the Form of Religion or not, repair to the Living, where they may be edified. Let who will, oppose it. What famous Mr. *Jenner* observes upon his Head, is most just, ãThat if there be any godly Soul, or any that desires the Salvation of his Soul, and lives under a blind Guide, he cannot go out (of his Parish) without giving very great Offense; it will be thot a Giddiness, and a Slighting of his own Minister at home. -When people came out of every Parish round about, to *John*, no Question but this bred Heart-burning against *John*, ay, and Ill-will against those People, that would not be satisfied with that Teaching they had in their own Synagogues.ä Thus far he. But tho your Neighbors growl against you, and reproach you for doing your Duty, in seeking your Souls Good; bear their unjust Censures with Christian Meekness, and persevere; as knowing that Suffering is the Lot of Christs Followers, and that spiritual Benefits do infinitely

overbalance all temporal Difficulties.

And O! that vacant Congregations would take due Care in the Choice of their Ministers! Here indeed they should hasten slowly. The Church of *Ephesus* is commended, for trying them which said they were Apostles, and were not; and for finding them Liars. Hypocrites are against all knowing of others, and Judging, in order to hide their own Filthiness; like Thieves they flee a Search, because of their stolen Goods. But the more they endeavor to hide, the more they expose their Shame. Does not the spiritual Man judge all Things? Tho he cannot know the States of subtle Hypocrites infallibly; yet may he not give a near Guess, who are the Sons of *Seeva*, by their Manner of Praying, Preaching, and Living? Many Pharisee-Teachers have got a long fine String of Prayer by Heart, so that they are never at a Loss about it; their Prayers and Preachings are generally of a Length, and both as dead as a Stone, and without all Savour. I beseech you, my dear Brethren, to consider, That there is no Probability of your getting Good, by the Ministry of Pharisees. For they are no Shepherds (no faithful ones) in Christs Account. They are as good as none, nay, worse than none, upon some Accounts. For take them first and last, and they generally do more Hurt than Good. They serve to keep better out of the Places where they live; nay, when the Life of Piety comes near their Quarters, they rise up in Arms against it, consult, contrive and combine in their Conclaves against it, as a common Enemy, that discovers and condemns their Craft and Hypocrisy. And with what Art, Rhetorick, and Appearances of Piety, will they varnish their Opposition of Christs Kingdom? As the Magicians imitated the works of *Moses*, so do false Apostles, and deceitful Workers, the Apostles of Christ.

I shall conclude this Discourse with the Words of the Apostle *Paul*, 2 *Cor. 11. 14,15*.

And no Marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of Light: Therefore it is no great Thing if his Ministers also be transformed as the Ministers of Righteousness; whose End shall be according to their Works.