

The Faithful Minister of the New Covenant

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"My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared Me, and was afraid before My name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with Me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity"--Malachi 2:5-6.

The state of the Jewish priesthood, at the time this prophet wrote, was profligate in the extreme. As men, they were ungodly and licentious; as priests, they were unfaithful; and as teachers, they "kept not the law of truth," but "departed out of the way." Through them the office became a scandal and a byword. The sanctuary was defiled and the name of God blasphemed. Very fearful are the charges which the prophets were commanded to prefer against them, in the name of the Lord. From the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel to the days of Malachi, they had been receiving warning and rebuke, threatening and chastisement; yet, at the end of these two centuries, they were found even worse than at the beginning. Jeremiah had described them as "destroying and scattering the sheep of God's pasture." Ezekiel had represented them as "feeding themselves and not the flock"—as "eating the fat, clothing themselves with the wool; but not strengthening the diseased—not healing that which was sick—not binding up that which was broken—not bringing again that which was driven away—and not seeking that which was lost." Malachi also, many generations after, presents to us the picture of the priesthood in his day, unrelieved in aught from its former gloom. Though called priests of the Most High God, ministering at his altar, wearing the consecrated garments of their office, and bearing the holy vessels of the sanctuary, they yet despised the name of Jehovah—they offered polluted bread upon His altar—they brought the torn, the lame, and the sick for sacrifice—they said of His service, "Behold, what a weariness is it!"—they committed abomination, corrupting the covenant of Levi, and "profaning the holiness of the Lord." It was thus that the last prophet of Israel was commissioned to proclaim the sins of an apostate and ungodly priesthood. It was thus that he was sent forth, bearing to them the awful burden which his prophecy contains—denouncing against them the righteous displeasure of that God whose compassionate forbearance and patient love they had tried so long.

But yet, at the very time that Jehovah was thus warning them of coming doom, and threatening them with the inflictions of His hot displeasure, He addresses to them words of most marvelous longsuffering and tender compassion—the words of one still lingering with fond forbearance over His desolate heritage, His bleating flock—unwilling to deliver up to vengeance that once honored, once faithful priesthood, who had borne His name for many generations, and been anointed with His holy oil! Ere removing from their office the unworthy representatives of Aaron, and Eleazar, and Phinehas, He reminds them tenderly, in the passage before us, of the gracious nature of that covenant which they were despising—a covenant of life and peace

established with the fathers of the consecrated tribe that served the altar. He reminds them of the reverence and godly fear which had marked their fathers, and because of which, the covenant of life and peace had been committed to their hands. He reminds them of the character, the speech, the walk, and deportment which had signalized their fathers; and He makes mention of the glorious success which had followed their labors, as teachers of the people. Thus He recalls them to the holy associations of a better age the still unforgotten blessings of a purer, happier priesthood. No rebuke could be severer than that here administered, by the contrast thus drawn between the prevailing corruption of the time and the purity of earlier days. Yet no admonition or expostulation could be more gently and more affectionately conveyed than this. It speaks as tenderly to the heart as it does loudly to the conscience.

Nothing can be more beautiful than the description here given of the character of the early Jewish priesthood—the house of Levi, ere they had left their first love, and corrupted the covenant of their father. "My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared Me, and was afraid before My name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with Me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity." Most precious words! Simply, yet strikingly, descriptive of the character, the walk, the speech, the successful labors of a faithful priest, and not less so of a faithful minister of the Lord Jesus. How forcibly do these verses recall the similar commendations bestowed by the Chief Shepherd upon some of the angels of the churches of Asia! "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted." Thus we are taught, that it is the same Great Shepherd under whom we hold office as in the case of Israel—the same Master whom we serve—the same errand on which we are employed—the same end which is set before us—the *conversion of souls*—the turning of sinners from the error of their ways. There is also the same holiness of life and conversation—the same peaceful walking in the light of God's reconciled countenance—the same heavenly—mindedness and calm superiority to the world—the same simple, disinterested, devoted warmth—the same patient laborious zeal—the same tender compassion for souls—and the same desire to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. But let us consider the prophet's words more minutely, and in exact order.

1. We have the nature of the trust committed of old to the Levitical priesthood, and now to the ministers of Christ. "My covenant was with him of life and peace." That covenant—the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure—by which God designed to convey life and peace to His people, was entrusted to the care and guardianship of the priesthood. It was deposited in their hands for the benefit of Israel. They were not merely to enjoy its provisions of grace themselves, but to make them known to the people, that they might become partakers of its unsearchable riches. Brief, but full, is the sum here given us of its blessings—"life and peace"—eternal life and peace with God. Their daily sacrifices and ceremonies pointed to these, and their daily instructions opened up the glad tidings of great joy, which these rites both foreshadowed and contained. Such was the office of the sons of Levi under the law, and such is still the office of Christ's ministers under the gospel. Jehovah's covenant of life and peace is still with us; nay, more truly and really with us now than it was of old with the legal priesthood. For now the darkness is past, the shadows have fled, and the true light has risen.

Now the mere figures of the truth have vanished away, and the TRUTH itself has come! He who is our life and peace, has, in the fullness of time, been revealed. Our covenant, then, is especially that of life and peace. Our office, our embassy, our message, are of life and peace. Ours is the silver trumpet that proclaims the dawn of jubilee. Ours is the olive branch that speaks of abated waters and indignation overpast. Ours is the ministry of reconciliation that tells of "glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill toward men."

It is through Jesus, then, that we are commanded to proclaim life and peace. It is through the blood of the Lamb that these blessings flow. It is Jesus, the LIFE of the world that we preach to men—Jesus the light of life—Jesus the fountain of life—Jesus the bread of life and the water of life—Jesus the resurrection and the life—Jesus the way, and the truth, and the life—Jesus the living and the life—giving One! It is through Him alone—through His finished work and perfected righteousness—that we proclaim lasting life to sinners; testifying, according to His own words, that "whosoever believeth in Him though he were dead, yet shall he live"; and that "this is life eternal, to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent." It is thus that we are "to preach the gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven."

It is Jesus also, as the world's PEACE, that we preach to sinners. "He is our peace," says the apostle—He has made peace through the blood of His cross. He is the blessed peacemaker between man and God. His incarnation speaks of peace; for He is thus revealed as Immanuel, God with us, so making peace. His life speaks peace: and in every action was this embodied, as well as in every word declared. His death was the mighty declaration of peace, for by this He made reconciliation for iniquity. His blood shed for many for the remission of sins, ratified the covenant of peace. His legacy was peace—"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you." His resurrection was the seal of peace. His gospel which is now entrusted to our hands, is the gospel of peace—peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

There can be no peace in the soul, till there is peace with God; and there can be no peace with God till sin is completely forgiven, and God's anger against us, on account of sin, wholly turned away. None but a justified soul can have peace. Peace without forgiveness is a lie. Distance from God is the source of our disquietude; and alienation from God is the deadly wound that must be healed, ere the soul have one moment's real peace. There is, no doubt, such a thing as worldly peace—the peace of prosperous days—the peace of pleasure—the peace of fancy—the peace of carnal security—the peace of selfrighteousness—the peace of a seared conscience the peace of reckless hardihood, that banishes God from the thoughts, and cares not whether the Holy One be his friend or not. But these are all mere names of fiction—names given by a deluded world that never felt the glad reality of the peace which passeth all understanding. There can be no peace till we know whether God be our friend or our enemy whether heaven or hell be our eternal home. There can be no peace save that which flows from a sense of the forgiving love of a reconciled God. This is peace; this is life; this is blessedness: all else is hollow—a shadow—a dream—a lie!

Possessing this life and peace in our own souls, we go forth to preach them to others. Having entered personally into this everlasting covenant, we proclaim its riches abroad. Having tasted the blessedness of being wholly forgiven, we rejoice to proclaim it around. Being ourselves reconciled through the blood of the covenant, we beseech men to be reconciled too. Having felt

the preciousness of Christ ourselves, we testify what we have seen and known of Him, that we may commend Him to others. For it is not merely the fact of being formally entrusted with this errand—this covenant—that animates our zeal to make it known; it is especially the consciousness of possessing the treasure ourselves. It is this that gives liberty of heart and utterance; it is this that gives us boldness and fidelity; and, on the other hand, it is the want of this consciousness that straitens, our soul—that damps our energy and fills us with the fear of man. When we speak of eternal life to our people, we speak as those who have already found it for ourselves. When we speak of peace and forgiveness, we speak in the fullness of hearts that are already partakers of these. When we go after the lost and wandering, we do it as those who have already returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. When we speak of joy to the sorrowful and rest to the troubled, we do it as those who have found rest for their own souls, and have learned to sink all their own sorrows in the fathomless ocean of their Father's love. Thus resting on this covenant of life and peace which is entrusted to us, we go forth to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ. A dispensation of the gospel is committed to us. Necessity is laid upon us; yea, woe is unto us, if we preach not the gospel.

11. This covenant was entrusted to Levi, because he had been found faithful. This life and peace were placed in his hands, because he had been found approved of God. "I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared Me, and was afraid before My name." The circumstances in which this solemn trust was made over to his guardianship, are related in the twenty-fifth chapter of Numbers. Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, had manifested his zeal for God, by his promptitude in avenging the dishonor done to His name in the matter of Israel's transgression with the daughters of Moab. On which occasion we read, "The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned away My wrath from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for My sake among them. Wherefore say, *Behold I give unto him My covenant of peace*; and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood" (vv. 10-13). To this, also, allusion is manifestly made, in Moses' blessing upon the tribes. "Of Levi he said, Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy Holy One; who said to his father and to his mother, I have not seen him. They have observed Thy word, and kept Thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments and Israel Thy law." Being found zealous for the name and honor of Jehovah—for the purity of His worship, for the integrity of His law—he was singled out from the tribes, and the covenant of life and peace entrusted to his care. In like manner, the apostle, speaking of those to whom the gospel was to be committed, says to Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me, the same commit thou to *faithful* men, who shall be able to teach others also." And further, in another place, he says, "It is required of stewards that they be found *faithful*."

It is then, because we have been judged faithful and zealous for God, that we have been placed in the office of the ministry; and, accordingly, this is one of the very solemn questions which our Church requires to be put, ere the hands of the Presbytery are laid upon us—"Are not zeal for the glory of God, love to Jesus Christ, and desire of saving souls, your great motives, and chief inducements, to enter into the function of the holy ministry?" What, then, are the prerequisites of character which warrant the Church in committing to our hands the ministry of the Word and the charge of souls? Our text sums them all up in one—*holy fear of God*. But, oh! How much does this imply? What piety, what reverence, what love, what devotedness, what sensitiveness to the honor of God, what jealousy for His name, what zeal for His glory! It

is not eloquence, it is not learning, it is not wisdom, or genius, or high estate, that are required. No; it is holy fear and love: it is, that we really know the God we speak of—the Savior whom we preach; it is, that we have really "passed from death to life" ourselves; it is, that we have the love of God in our hearts, and the fear of God before our eyes.

Will God commit the ministry of the gospel to unconverted men? Will God commission and accredit, as the messengers of life and peace, men who have never tasted these themselves? Will God entrust the vessels of the sanctuary to the guardianship of uncleansed, unholy hands? Is it nothing to him, whether it be Nadab and Abihu, or Eleazar and Ithamar? Is it nothing to him, whether the blood of the consecrated sacrifice be upon their ear, their hands, or their feet? Is it nothing to him, whether the holy anointing oil be sprinkled on their heads? Is it nothing to him, whether they are clothed with the heaven-appointed raiment, "for glory and for beauty"—whether the Urim and the Thummim glitter on their jeweled breast—and whether on their foreheads be engraven in characters of gold, the inscription of the sanctuary, "HOLINESS TO THE LORD"? "Lovest thou Me?" is still the Savior's question to those whom He appoints shepherds of the flock, which He hath purchased with His own blood; and still He expects the same decided answer, "Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee," ere He grants the solemn commission, "Feed My sheep; feed My lambs."

III. We have the manner in which the faithful priesthood fulfilled their character and discharged their office. "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with Me in peace and equity." The utterance of his mouth was truth; no deceit or wickedness was found in his lips; his life was like Enoch's—a close and continual walk with God. He kept by the side of the God of truth, maintaining peaceful, holy fellowship with Him, he leaned upon His arm, he was guided by His eye, he learned the law at His lips. What a picture of the bold fidelity, the godly simplicity of ministerial character; and of the heavenly walk, the holy calm, of ministerial *life!* Such is the character and such the life of a minister of the Lord Jesus; and for all this, his sufficiency is of God. For holiness, of life, he looks to the power of the indwelling Spirit; for wisdom, he rests on the promise, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." It is to the Master's image that the servant is to be conformed. His character is our model, His life our rule. "He has left us an example that we should follow His steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." Our light is to shine before men, as His shone while here. We are not only His servants, but we are His representatives on earth. We are set to reflect His character to the world, that men may know Him through us, and glorify His name. How responsible is our position! How much it concerns us as Christians, how much more as ministers, to represent Him truly, to reflect Him faithfully, both to His own people and to a world that knows Him and esteems Him not! We, as ministers of His Word, are especially to be "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men."

In this description of the prophet, there is a twofold exhibition of the faithful minister; first, in his character; and, second, in his life; and in each of these, again there is a twofold division. His character is first described positively, then negatively. His life is set forth as being first a walk of peace, and then of equity.

1. *His character.* "The law of truth was in his lips, and iniquity was not found in his mouth." He approved himself a faithful and a true witness for his God, holding fast the truth, and

departing from evil. Walking in the footsteps of this ancient Pattern, we are called upon to declare to the flocks over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers, the whole counsel of God: keeping back nothing that is profitable, being zealous for the truth, and not teaching nor tolerating any manner or degree of error. We are to "preach, not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord," His infinitely glorious person, His infinitely perfect and precious work. In Him are summed up all truth, all wisdom, all knowledge. Out of Him, and apart from Him, there is neither truth, nor wisdom, nor knowledge for the soul of man. In Him all perfection dwells; in Him all excellencies, divine and human, visible and invisible, shine forth with matchless luster; in Him all beauty centers; in Him all life has its source; from Him all glory radiates—to Him all power is committed, in earth and heaven; round Him all government revolves. He is the sum of all that we preach. He is *truth* itself, and in testifying of Him, we fulfill our office as witnesses for the truth. It is this, that makes our ministry such a solemn thing; it is this, that makes even minute accuracy in our preaching so momentous, and even a shade of error so perilous. To err in our representations of common truths is reckoned, and within certain limits, may with all safety be reckoned, a matter of but trivial moment. Not so in preaching Christ; no truth is unimportant which relates to Him; no error can be without its serious consequences of evil which misrepresents Him. In preaching Christ, it is no common crime to speak at random, or to speak without regard being duly had to careful exactness of argument and opinion. To err here is to dishonor Christ, and to injure souls. We must preach Him *wholly*, we must preach Him *fully*, we must preach Him *truly*. We must not merely beware of denying Him, but we must beware of setting Him forth imperfectly, or even with cold exactness, as if unwilling to commend His worth by any expression of our esteem or love: we must not merely refrain from marring His beauty, but even from hiding or defacing the very hem of His garment. It can be no slight evil in the Father's eyes, to diminish aught of the glory of Him "in whom his soul delighteth": who is "the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person." It must be a crime needing both repentance and forgiveness, in the eyes of the God of truth, to set forth amiss the character or work of Him who is TRUTH itself—Incarnate *truth*; and who is for this very end revealed, that He might be the full and perfect manifestation of truth to angels and men. It can be no trivial injury done to souls, when we testify amiss of Him who is "the way, the truth, and the life," the "door," the access, "the new and living way" to the Father's house; of Him who is the sinner's hope, the sinner's surety and substitute, the sinner's peace, the sinner's high priest and advocate above. Oh! How infinitely momentous, that, in all that pertaineth to Christ, and His work for sinners, "the law of truth should be in our lips, and iniquity not found in our mouth."

2. *His life*. "He walked with Me in peace and equity." His daily life corresponded fully with his ministerial character. His life was like godly Enoch's—a continual walk with God; holiness was in his lips, and holiness was in his life. His words were *of* God, and his *walk* with God. How fair the picture of the faithful, the upright, the wise, the consistent, the godly priest! What a model for the life of a minister of Christ! First of all, he walks with God "*in peace*." He walks in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. He has found peace with God, through the blood of the Cross, and therefore walks with God as a forgiven child with a reconciled father. He has found rest for his soul in Christ, and rejoices in the conscious liberty of his divine adoption. He walks with God in peace! He dwells in the light of His countenance—he delights in His smiles. "Perfect love has cast out fear." He rejoices in his *felt* reconciliation, *felt* nearness, *felt* relationship. He leans upon His arm, and "Abba, Father," is the unbidden, the joyful utterance

of lip and heart. He walks with God in peace! God is the life, the light, the portion of his soul; he has found the favor of God, and in that favor is life. Nothing now seems burdensome, but the body of sin; his yoke is broken, his fetters cast away. How peaceful, how even, how sweet, is the tenor of his life! Without this peace, this conscious reconciliation, all labor for God is a burden—all service, bondage. Without this, all ministerial work is irksome; all care in teaching or in tending the flock, is weariness and vexation of spirit. Oh! If ever any man upon earth should walk closely and peacefully with God, it is the minister of the gospel; if ever any man should dread distance and dispeace between his soul and God, it is he; if anyone needs to have his conscience daily sprinkled with the blood of atonement—to have his "conscience purged from dead works to serve the living God," it is *he*—It is *he*.

His life, however, is not merely a peaceful, but it is a *holy* walk with God. "He walked with Me in peace and equity." How consistent, how circumspect should we be in word and deed, who are invested with such an office as this. "Be ye clean ye that bear the vessels of the Lord." How careful should we be that we give none occasion to the weak to stumble, or to the enemy to blaspheme. What, though we preach the gospel, if we do not live it! What, though the Word of God be in our lips on Sabbath, if the world be in our speech, and in our lives throughout the week, and, if instead of the fellowship of the saints, we prefer the world's communionship! What, though we warn, or rebuke, or exhort, if our careless, foolish, worldly walk and conversation give the lie to our official testimony! How awful to undo throughout the week, either by our negligence or sinfulness, or conformity to the world, all that we were professing to do on the Sabbath! How necessary that we should be holy, spiritual, heavenly-minded—a continual rebuke to the ungodly, a continual pattern to the flock! How strange to let our light shine before men, when professionally called to do so; but to hide it under a bushel on every other occasion. And further, how responsible we are for being holy! We have not merely the promised gift of the Holy Spirit as Christians, but we have the special promise of this gift as ministers, that we may be fully anointed and fitted for our work. With such a full gift of the Holy One; with such a necessity laid upon us to be examples to the flock; and with such a pattern as the Chief Shepherd Himself, oh, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness. Let us be men of faith—men of prayer—men of love—men of patience, and meekness, and gentleness and heavenly-minded zeal—men of singleness of aim and simplicity of heart. Wherever we are, in whatever circumstances, in whatever company, let us never forget nor allow others to forget that we are ministers of the Lord Jesus. Let us be the pastor always, less than the pastor, never! Let us manifest to all men the light and luster of a holy life—the sweet serenity of a peaceful walk with God. Let us follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. Let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus. Oh! Let us beware lest it be said of us, "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

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