

Take Heed to Yourselfes

by Richard Baxter

Ministers must take heed to themselves, being cautious and careful in their own lives, ensuring that they are living according to God's will and not neglecting their own salvation.

Duration: 31:03

Scripture: Matthew 7:21, Matthew 25:40, Mark 12:31, Romans 8:30, 1 Corinthians 9:27, 1 Timothy 4:16, James 1:22

Topics: "Audio Books"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not being slothful in business but fervent in spirit. He urges the audience to lose no time and to diligently study, pray, confer, and practice in order to increase their abilities. The preacher warns against behaving weakly or with indifference when delivering God's message, as it can dishonor God and hinder the work of conversion. He also reminds the audience to be mindful of the scrutiny of the world and to walk circumspectly, redeeming the time because the days are evil. The sermon emphasizes the need for holy skill in preaching and the importance of honoring God in the delivery of His message.

Transcript

From the book, *The Reformed Pastor*, take heed to yourselves. What it is to take heed to ourselves, and what way it must be done. For the sake of brevity, I shall enjoin the application to the explication.

Therefore, take this explication as so much advice and exhortation to the duty, and let your hearts as well as your understandings attend to it. Take heed to yourselves, lest you be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and lest you be strangers to the effectual working of that gospel which you preach, and lest, while you proclaim the necessity of a Savior to the world, your own hearts neglect Him and cause you to miss an interest in Him and His saving benefits. Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish while you call upon others to beware of perishing, and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare food for them.

Though there is a promise of shining as the stars to those who turn many to righteousness, it is on the supposition that they are first turned to it themselves. Their own sincerity in the faith is a condition of their glory, simply considered, though their great ministerial labors may be a condition of the promise of their greater glory. Many men have warned others not to go to that place of torment, who yet have hurried there themselves.

Many a preacher is now in hell, who at a hundred times called upon his ears to use the utmost care and diligence to escape it. Is it reasonable to imagine that God will save men for offering salvation to others, while they refuse it themselves? Will He save them for telling others those truths which they neglect or abuse? Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher, but He saves those that are justified and sanctified, consequently those who are faithful in His Master's work. Take heed therefore to yourselves first, that you may be that which you persuade your hearers to be, that you believe that which you persuade them daily to believe, that you heartily entertain that Christ and that Spirit which you offer to others.

He who told you to love your neighbors as yourselves implied that you should love yourselves and not hate and destroy yourselves and them. Take heed to yourselves, lest you live in those actual sins in which you preach against in others, and lest you be guilty of that which you daily condemn. Will you make it your work to magnify God than when you have finished dishonor Him as much as others do? Will you proclaim Christ's governing power and yet show contempt for it and rebel against it yourselves? Will you preach His laws and yet willfully break them? If sin is evil, why do you live in it? If it is not, why do you dissuade men from it? If it is dangerous, how dare you venture on it? If it is not, why do you tell men it is? If God's threatenings are true, why do you not fear them? If they are false, why do you trouble men needlessly and put them into such frights without a cause? Do you know the judgment of God that they who commit such things are worthy of death? And yet will you do them? You that teach another, do you not teach yourself? Romans 1.32 You that say a man should not commit adultery or be a drunkard or covetous, are you such yourself? You that make your boast of the law, do you through breaking the law dishonor God? What, shall the same tongue speak evil that speaks against evil? Shall it censure and slander and secretly backbite, yet cry down these and others? Take heed of yourselves, lest you cry down sin and not overcome it.

While you seek to bring it down in others, beware that you do not bow to it and become its slaves yourselves. For of whom a man is overcome are the same as he brought into bondage. 2 Peter 2.19 To whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, you are servants to him whom you obey.

Whether it is of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness. Romans 6.16 It is easier to chide at sin than to overcome it. 3 Take heed to yourselves that you may not be unfit for the greatest employment you have undertaken.

He must not be a babe himself in knowledge, who desires to teach men all those mysterious things that must be known in order to be saved. Oh, what qualifications are necessary for that man who has such a charge upon him as we have! How many difficulties in divinity to be opened! How much must be known concerning the fundamentals! How many obscure passages of Scripture must be expounded! How many duties to be done, in which we and others may miscarry if they are not well informed as to the matter, the end, the manner, and the circumstances! How many sins to be avoided, which without understanding and foresight cannot be done! What a number of subtle temptations must we open to our people, that they may escape them! How many weighty and yet intricate cases of conscience do we have to resolve almost daily! Can so much work and such work as this be done by raw, inexperienced men? Oh, what strongholds we have to batter! What subtle, diligent, and obstinate resistance we must expect from every heart we deal with! Prejudice is blocked up our way. We can scarcely obtain a patient hearing.

They think ill of what we say, while we are still speaking it. We cannot make a breach in their groundless hopes and carnal peace, but they have twenty shifts and seeming reasons to make it up again, and twenty

enemies who appear to be friends are ready to help them. We do not dispute with them upon equal terms, but we have children to reason with, distracted men in spiritual things, who will howl us down with raging nonsense.

We have willful and reasonable people to deal with, who, when they are silenced, are never the more convinced. And when they can give you no reason, they will give you their resolution. We dispute the case against men's will, against his sensual passions, as much as against their understanding, and these have neither reason nor ears.

Their best arguments are, I will not believe you, nor all the preachers in the world in such things. I will not change my mind or my life. I will not leave my sins.

I will never be so precise whatever be the consequence. We have not only one, but multitudes of raging passions and contradicting enemies to dispute at once, whenever we go about the conversion of a sinner. As if a man were to dispute in a fair or in a tumult, or in the midst of a crowd of violent scolds, what equal dealing and what success could be expected there? Yet such is our work, and a work that must be done.

O dear brethren, what men should we be in skill, resolution, and unwary diligence? We who have this to do. Did Paul cry out, Who is sufficient for these things? And shall we be proud, careless, or lazy, as if we were sufficient? As Peter says to every Christian, in consideration of our great approaching change, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? So I may say to every minister, seeing all these things lie upon our hands, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy endeavors and resolutions for our work? This is not a burden for the shoulders of a child. What skill does every part of our work require, and of how much moment is every part? To preach a sermon is not the hardest part.

Yet what skill is necessary to make the truth plain, to convince the hearers, to let an irresistible light to their consciences, to keep it there and drive it all home, to screw the truth into their minds and work Christ into their affections, to meet every objection and clearly to resolve it, to drive sinners to a standstill and make them see that there is no hope of their escaping destruction, except they be converted. And to do all this, both for language and manner, becomes our work and yet suited to the capacities of our hearers. This and much more that should be done in every sermon surely requires to be done with a great deal of holy skill.

The great God whose message we deliver should be honored by our delivery of it. It is lamentable that in delivering a message from the God of heaven, of everlasting consequence to the souls of men, we should behave so weakly, so imprudently, or with so much coldness and indifference as to cause the whole to miscarry in our hands, and that through our weakness and neglect God may be dishonored, His work disgraced and sinners hardened rather than converted. How often have carnal hearers gone during home at the palpable and dishonorable failings of the preacher.

How many sleep under us because our hearts and tongues are sleepy, because we do not bring with us enough skill and zeal to awaken them. Moreover, what skill is necessary to defend the truth against gainsayers, and to deal with disputing quibblers? And if we yet fail through weakness, how they will insult in triumph. And who knows how many weak ones may be perverted by their success.

What skill is necessary to deal in private with poor ignorant souls for their conversion? O brethren, do not shrink and tremble under the sins of all this work. Will a common measure of holy skill and ability, of prudence and of other qualifications, serve for such a task as this? Yes, necessity may cause the church to tolerate the weak, but woe to us if we tolerate and indulge our own weakness. Do not reason and

conscience tell you that if you dare venture on so high a work as this, you should spare no pains to be fitted for the performance of it? Is it not now and then an idle snatch or taste of studies that will serve to make a sound divine? I know that laziness has taught us to make light of all our studies, and that the Spirit only must wholly qualify us for the work, as if God commanded the means, and yet would warrant our neglect of them, as if it were His way to cause us to thrive in a course of idleness, and to bring us to knowledge by dreams when we are asleep, or to take us up into heaven and show us His counsels while we think of no such matter, but lay rooted in the earth? O, that men should dare so sinfully by their laziness to quench the Spirit, and at the same time pretend the Spirit for their doing of it! God has required of us that we should not be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit.

O brethren, therefore, lose no time studying, pray, confer, and practice, for by these four ways your abilities must be increased. Take heed to yourselves, lest you be weak through your own negligence, and lest you mar the work of God by your weakness. As a man is, so is his strength, Judges 8.21. Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, lest you lay such stumbling blocks before the blindest to cause their ruin, lest you unsay with your lives that which you say with your tongues, and thus be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labors.

It greatly hinders our work when other men are all the week long contradicting to the people in private what we have been speaking to them from the word of God in public. But it will much more hinder if we ourselves contradict it, if our actions give our tongue the lie, if we build up an hour or two with our mouths, and all the week after pull down with our hands. This is a way to make men think that the word of God is but an idle tale, and to make preaching seem no better than babbling.

He who means as he speaks will surely do as he speaks. One proud, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action may cut the throat of many a sermon and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing. Tell me, brethren, in the fear of God, do you regard the success of your labors, or do you not? Do you long to see it upon the souls of your hearers? If you do not, why do you preach? Why do you study? Why do you call yourselves the ministers of Christ? But if you do, then surely you cannot find in your heart to mar your work for nothing.

What, do you regard the success of your labors, and yet will not part with a little to the poor? What, you will not put up with an injury stooped to the meanest, nor forbear your passionate or lordly courage, not even for the winning of souls and to attain the end of all your labors? You much regard their success, indeed, to sell it so cheaply. It is a palpable error in those ministers who make such a difference between their preaching and their living. They study hard to preach exactly, and yet study little or none at all to live exactly.

All the week long is little enough to study how to speak two hours, and yet one hour seems too much to study how to live all the week. They hate to misplace a word in their sermons, or to be guilty of any remarkable mistake or blunder. And I do not blame them, for the matter is holy and weighty.

But they think nothing of misplacing affections, words, and actions in the course of their lives. Oh, how carefully have I heard some men preach, and how carelessly have I seen them live! They have been so acrid as to the wording part of their preparations. Seldom preaching seemed a virtue to them so that their language might be polished more.

And all the rhetorical, jingling writers they could meet with were pressed to serve them for the adorning of their style. They were likewise so nice in hearing others that no man pleased them who spoke as he

thought. And yet when it came to a matter of practice, and they were once out of church, how careless were the men, and how little did they regard what they said or did, provided it was not so palpably gross as to dishonor them.

They who preach precisely would not live precisely. What a difference between their pulpit speeches and their everyday discourse! They who cannot bear vulgar solacisms and paralogisms in a sermon can easily tolerate them in their conversation. Certainly, brethren, we have a very great cause to take heed what we do, as well as what we say.

If we will indeed be the servants of Christ, we must not be tongue servants only, but we must be doers of His work, so that we may be blessed in our deed. As our people must be doers of the word and not hearers only, so we must be doers and not preachers only. A practical doctrine must be practically preached.

We must study as hard how to live well as how to preach well. We must think and think again how to order our lives so as to make them tend to men's salvation, as well as compose our sermons. When ye are studying what to say to them, I know these are your thoughts, or else they are worthless and to no purpose.

How shall I get within them? What shall I say that is most likely to effectually convince and convert them? Then should you not as diligently think, How shall I live? What shall I say and do? And how shall I dispose of all that I have so as to tend to the saving of men's souls? Brethren, if saving souls is your end, you will certainly intend it as well out of the pulpit as in it. If it is your end, you will live for it and contribute all your endeavors to attain it. And if you do so, you will as well ask concerning the money in your purse as the words from your mouth, Which way should I lay it out for the greatest good, especially for the souls of men? Oh, that it were your daily study how to use your substance, your friends, and all that you have for God, as well as your tongues.

Then we should see that fruit of your labors, which otherwise will never likely be seen. If you intend the end of the ministry in the pulpit only, then it seems you take yourselves for ministers no longer than you were there. And if so, I think you are unworthy to be esteemed such at all.

The reasons why you must take heed to yourselves. I entreat you to take the following reasons as so many motives to awaken you to your duty and to apply them as we go. Number one, you have a heaven to win or lose yourselves and souls that must be happy or miserable forever.

Therefore it concerns you to begin at home and to take heed to yourselves as well as to others. Preaching well may succeed to the salvation of others without the holiness of your own hearts or lives. It is possible at least, though not usual.

But it is impossible that it should serve to save yourselves. Many shall say that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? They shall be answered with, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity.

O sirs, how many men have preached Christ and yet perished for lack of a saving interest in him? How many that are now in hell have told their people of the torments of hell, warning them to avoid it? How many have preached of the wrath of God against sinners and now they are feeling it? O what more melancholic case can there be than for a man that made it his trade in calling to proclaim salvation and to

help others to attain it, yet after all to be himself lost forever? Alas for us that we should have so many books in our libraries that tell us the way to heaven, that we should spend so many years in reading those books and studying the doctrine of eternal life, and after all this to miss it, that we should study and preach so many sermons on salvation and yet fall short of it, so many sermons on condemnation and yet fall into it, and all because we preached so many sermons concerning Christ while we were neglecting him, on the Spirit while we resisted him, on faith while we did not heartily believe, on repentance and conversion while we continued to be carnal and earthly. If we are divines only in tongue and title, and have not the divine image upon our souls, nor give up ourselves to the divine honor and will, it is no wonder if we are separated from the divine presence and denied the fruition of God forever. Believe it, sirs, God is no respecter of persons.

He saves men not for their coats or their callings. A holy calling will not save an unholy man. If you stand at the door of the kingdom of grace in order to light the way for others to get in, and yet you will not go in yourself, then you shall knock in vain at the gates of glory.

You who would not enter at the door of grace, you shall then find that your lamp should have had the oil of grace as well as of ministerial gifts, of holiness as well as of doctrine, in order to have a part in the glory you preached. Need I tell you that preachers of the gospel must be judged by the gospel, and they must stand at the same bar and be sentenced on the same terms? They shall be dealt with as severely as other men. Therefore take heed to yourselves for your own sakes, since you have souls to save or lose as well as others, and you must be saved in the same way and on the same terms.

2. Take heed to yourselves, for you have a depraved nature and sinful inclinations as well as others. If innocent Adam had need to take heed, and if he lost himself in us for lack of care, how much more need do we have? Sin dwells in us, however much we may have preached without it. One degree of it prepares a heart to another, and one sin inclines the mind to more.

If one thief is in the house, he will let the rest in, because they have the same disposition and design. A spark in the beginning of a flame and a small disease may bring a greater. A man that knows himself to be blind should be careful where he walks.

Alas, even in our hearts as well as in our ears, there is an averseness to God, a strangeness to Him, an unreasonable, almost unruly mob of passions. In us there are the remnants of pride, unbelief, self-seeking, hypocrisy, and the most hateful and deadly sins. Does it not then concern us to be wary? Is so much of the fire of hell unextinguished, that which was at first in us? Are there so many traitors in our very hearts? And is it not time for us to take heed? You will scarcely allow your children to go by themselves while they are weak without telling them to be careful lest they fall.

And how weak, alas, are those of us that seem the strongest! How apt are we to stumble at a very straw! How small a matter can cast us down by enticing us to foolishness, kindling our passions and inordinate desires, perverting our judgment, abating our resolutions, cooling our zeal, or interrupting our diligence. Ministers are not only sons of Adam, but sinners against the grace of Christ as well as others. Therefore they have increased their radical sin, Those treacherous hearts will at one time or another deceive you if you do not take heed.

Those sins that now seem to lie dead will revive. Your pride, your worldliness, and your many other rotten vices will spring up. Those sins that you thought had been weeded out by the roots will grow again.

It is therefore most necessary that men of such infirmity should take heed to themselves and be exceedingly careful of their own souls. 3. Rather also take heed to yourselves, because so great a work as ours puts men on greater exercise in trial of their graces, since they are exposed to greater temptations than most men. Weaker gifts and graces may carry a man out in a more private and even course of life, one who is not called to such great trials.

Smaller strength may serve for lighter work, but if you dare venture upon the great work of the ministry, if you dare lead the troops of Christ against the face of Satan and his followers, if you dare engage yourselves against principalities, powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places, if you undertake to rescue captivated sinners and fetch men out of the devil's paws, then do not think that a heedless, careless minister is fit for such great work as this is. You must expect to come off with greater shame and deeper wounds of conscience than if you lived a common life, if you attempt to go through such things as these with a careless soul. We have seen many men who lived as private Christians in good reputation for parts and for piety, but when they took upon themselves either military employment or a judgeship where the work was above their ability, and there were exposed to temptations above their strength, they proved a disgrace to the office they sustained.

And we have also known some private Christians of note who having fought too highly of their ability dared to thrust themselves into the ministerial office, but they proved empty men and burdens to the church. They might have done God more service in the station of the higher rank of private men than they do among the lowest in the ministry. If you will venture into the midst of the enemies and dare to bear the burden and the heat of the day, then take heed to yourselves.

4. Take heed to yourselves, because the tempter will make his first and sharpest attack on you. He bears those of greatest malice who were engaged to do him the greatest mischief. As he hates Christ more than any of us, because he is the general of the field and the captain of our salvation, and because he does more than all the world against a kingdom of darkness, so he hates the leaders under Christ more than he hates the common soldiers for the same reason.

He knows what devastation he is likely to make among the rest if he can make the leaders fall before their eyes. He has long practiced fighting, neither against great nor small comparatively, but against the shepherds that he might scatter to the flock. And his success has been so great that he will follow it as far as he is able.

Take heed then, for the enemy has a special eye on you. You are sure to have his most subtle insinuations, incessant solicitations and violent assaults. Take heed to yourselves, lest he outwit you.

The devil is a greater scholar than you are and a more nimble disputant. He can transform himself into an angel of light in order to deceive you. He will get within you and trip up your heels before you know it.

He will cheat you of your faith or innocence before you are aware of it. He will make you believe it is multiplied or increased even after it is lost. You shall see neither hood nor line, much less a subtle angler himself, while he is offering you his bait.

And his bait shall be so fitted to your temper and disposition that he will be sure to find advantages within you and thus make your own principles and inclinations betray you. And whenever he prevails against you he will make you the instrument of your own ruin. Oh, what a conquest it is when he makes a minister lazy and unfaithful or if he draws him into some scandalous sin.

He then glories against the church saying, Are these your holy preachers? You see what their preciseness has come to? He even glories against Jesus Christ saying, Are these your champions? I can make your chief servants forsake you and abuse you. I can make the stewards of your house unfaithful. If he insulted God upon a false surmise and tells him he could make Job curse God to his face, what will he not do if he should prevail against us? And at last he will insult and triumph over you for betraying your great trust, disgracing your holy profession and doing such essential service to your greatest enemy.

Oh, do not gratify Satan in this way. Do not make him so happy. Do not allow him to use you as the Philistines use Samson, first to deprive you of your strength, then put out your eyes, and finally to make you the subject of his triumph and derision.

Number five. Take heed to yourselves also, because there are many eyes upon you, therefore many are watching you. And if you miscarry, the world will ring with it.

The eclipses of the sun by day are seldom without witnesses. If you have engaged to be the light of the world in the church, you must expect that men's eyes will be upon you. Although other men may sin without observation, you cannot.

And you should thankfully consider what a great mercy it is that you have so many eyes to watch over you, so many ready to tell you of your faults. For by these you have greater help than others do. For these eyes restrain you from sin, even though some may watch you maliciously, yet you have the advantage.

God forbid that we should do evil in public and sin willfully while the world is gazing at us. For those who sleep, sleep in the night, and those who are drunken are drunken in the night. 1 Thessalonians 5.7 What fornicator is so imprudent is to sin in the open streets.

Consider that you are always in the open. Even the light of your own doctrine will disclose your evil deeds. While you are as light set upon a hill, do not expect to lie hidden.

Take heed, therefore, and do your work as those who remember that the world is looking at them with a quick eye of malice. They are ready to make the worst of everything and ready to find the smallest fault. Then they will aggravate it where they find it, and they will divulge it as far as it will answer their designs.

Yes, they can even make faults where they cannot find them. How cautiously should we walk before so many evil-minded observers! See, thence, that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Take heed to yourselves, because your sins are more heinous than the sins of others.

It is noted among King Afonso's sayings that a great man cannot commit a small sin. We may with more propriety say that a teacher of others cannot commit a small sin, or at least that a sin which is comparatively small in another becomes great when committed by a teacher. Observe, then, you are more likely than others to sin against knowledge because you have more knowledge than they have.

At least you sin against more light and means of knowledge. What, do you know not the covetousness and pride of sins? Don't you know the dreadful consequence of being unfaithful to your trust? Will you not by negligence or self-seeking betray immortal souls? You know your master's will, and therefore if you don't do it, you shall be beaten with many stripes. If you sin, it is because you desire to sin.

Your sins have more hypocrisy in them than those of other men. Oh, what a heinous thing it is to study to say all that we can against sin, and then make it as odious to our people as possible. And when we have done, so be found to live in sin, secretly cherishing that which we so openly defamed.

What vile hypocrisy it is to make it our daily work to cry down sin, yet hug it to our own bosoms. How can we declaim against sin in public while we make it our companion in private, bind heavy burdens on others, and not so much as touch ourselves with a finger? What will you say to this on judgment day? Do you think ill of sin, or do you not? If you do not, why do you pretend? If you do, why do you commit it, or do not bear that badge of the miserable Pharisees? They say, but do not. Many a minister of the gospel will be confounded at last by this heavy charge of hypocrisy.

Number three, your sin has more perfidiousness in it than that of other men. You are more publicly and solemnly engaged against it. Besides all your common engagements as Christians, you have many more as ministers.

How often have you proclaimed the evil and danger of sin and then called sinners from it? How often have you declared the terrors of the Lord? All these implied that you saw the evil of it and had renounced it yourselves. Every sermon you preached against it, every private exhortation, every confession of it in the congregation laid an engagement upon you to forsake it. Every child that you baptized and entered into the covenant with Christ, every administration of the Lord's Supper in which you called men to renew their covenant implied that you had renounced the flesh and the world and given yourselves to Christ.

How often and how openly have you borne witness to the odiousness and damnable nature of sin, and yet will you entertain it against all these professions and testimonies of your own? Oh, what treachery it is to make such a stir in the pulpit against sin and then to cuddle it in your own heart and give it room there that is due to God, yes, even to prefer it before the glory of the saints. Many more aggravations of your sins might be mentioned, but lack of time obliges us to leave them to your consideration.

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