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"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

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Religious.

PASTORAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

THE CIRCULAR "LETTER OF THE WESTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, CONVENED AT LONG ISLAND, JUNE 20TH, 1868, TO THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.

Dear Brethren,—

It is beyond the limit of human ability to calculate the greatness of a Christian Pastor's work. It is more important than the painter's, because it aims to place the most inimitable and impressive picture, on imperishable canvass. It is more important than the sculptor's, because it aims to carve from the most precious and enduring material, images to the universal and eternal fame of the most worthy Being. It is more important than the inventor's, because it brings to the possession of the most lowly, instruments by which, in the utmost poverty and weakness, he can "do all things." It is more important than the explorer's, because it discovers to the soul new regions of unbounded extent, of invariable fertility, of exhaustless wealth, and of the "fulness of God." That we may be incited to make fuller "proof of our ministry," and to lead forward to their high and wondrous destiny, the souls entrusted to our care and guidance, is the design of the remarks that will follow.

That the Christian Pastor is divinely called, and "made overseer" of a particular flock, either by means of special indications of Providence, or of both, we assume as admitted facts. Passing from these, let us notice that as the first duty of an Officer is to obey, so the first duty of a Pastor, is to do the will of Christ. The Apostle says, "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ," and no man should attempt to mould the religious character of a people, without like Josiah, imposing the same religious obligations first upon himself.

Indeed the Saviour has placed the duty of obedience the first, as well for the teacher as the taught. Matthew v. 19: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." May it never be said truthfully of us, Ministers and Pastors, as it was of the Scribes and Pharisees, "They say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."

But as it is sometimes difficult and self-crucifying to apply the teachings and requirements of the gospel to one-self, so may we expect that the application of them will be to others. Yet who that is a faithful and trustworthy physician, will withhold the requisite medicine, because it appears offensive, or refrain from probing the wound or adjusting the fracture because it occasions pain. And yet is it not to be feared that we who profess to be physicians in a higher and more responsible sense, even the physicians of souls, occasion many to go sickly and limping through life simply because we shrink, in the time when it is needed, from applying the doctrines, reproofs, or corrections, which the Bible enjoins, and the church requires. Many, no doubt, in all our churches, as in the churches of all time, by the repugnance which they manifest to the plain, pointed, practical, preaching of God's Word, say to their ministers, as was said to the prophets of old, "Speak unto us smooth things." But it is our duty as much as it was theirs to "preach the preaching that He bids us," "Whether they will hear or whether they will forbear," "He that hath a dream let him tell a dream, and he that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully, what is the chaff to the wheat, saith the Lord. Is not my Word like as a fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"

The doctrines of the gospel, however offensive to the carnal professor, will prove the best food for a converted church; and however repulsive to the natural heart, they will nevertheless kill its cancer, and prepare for the healing balm of grace.

The precepts, reproofs, and corrections of the Word, may cause many to go away and walk with us no more, but the remaining few will be like the select residue of Gideon's army, through whom the weapons of the Lord

and of his servants will be more than victorious. Though the doctrines of the gospel should disturb the feelings, or even excite the enmity of men, though the precepts of the gospel should confound and arouse to defence the hearers thereof; though others should rebel at the painful corrections and reproofs of the Word, yet may it never be said of us as it was of the ancient prophet, "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly. Saying peace, peace, when there is no peace."

But again, the duty of a pastor to his people, which may be considered as the mainspring of all the rest is to love them. He should love them as no other minister can, and as he loves no other people. He occupies the relation of spiritual father to them, and should love them as a father loves his children. He stands in Christ's stead to them, and should love them, in his measure, as Christ loves his church.—(Philippians i. 8. 1 Thessalonians ii. 7, 8.) His love for them should lead him to be self-forgetful in his desire for their good. His love for them should lead him, even though at the crucifixion of his own feelings to teach them "all that would be profitable" to them. His love for them should lead him to take an interest in their temporal welfare; to sympathize with them in their afflictions, and especially to manifest an unwearied concern for prosperity of their souls. In order to do this he must be conversant with his people. He must acquaint himself as far as possible, with their individual experience and condition; and labor with them personally, to humble the proud, to restrain the too forward, to correct the erring, to encourage the timid, to strengthen the feeble, to instruct the ignorant, and to stimulate and direct into useful channels, the energies of all. He should strive to be "a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes." He should "feed the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made him overseer." He should "watch for their souls as one that must give account." He should strive, not only by the private and the public teaching of his tongue, but by the constant and blameless example of his life to be able to say, "Those things which ye have both received, and heard, and seen in me, do," and thus to become, both a teacher, and an ensample to the flock.

But we shall notice some things especially which a Pastor should teach his people.

1. Men's natural depravity, and the source and grounds of their hope, and thus divesting them of all human and self-dependence, lay the foundation of their entire trust in Christ, "Other foundation can no man lay."

Such teaching is calculated to induce strength of faith, steadiness of purpose, evenness of temperament, hopefulness, humility, gratitude, and love.

2. He should teach them, and endeavor to illustrate by his own deportment, that the redeemed of Christ, "are not their own, but are bought with a price." This principle instilled by his precepts, and impressed by his example, will form the basis of patience and submission under affliction and bereavement, of faithfulness in christian labor, of honesty in dealing, of consistency in deportment, and of willing and cheerful benevolence in the cause of Christ.

3. He should teach them reverence for, and obedience to God's Word. He should never quote in jest or familiar pleasantries the sacred utterances of Scripture, nor indulge in joke on religious ordinances, even though of other denominations, and contrary to his views. Reverence for things sacred, and veneration for the Divine Word, will tend to promote consistent and scriptural religious sentiments, and result in more steady and conscientious adherence to the principles and precepts of the Bible.

4. He should teach them the duty of cultivating the spirit of christian oneness and brotherhood. Like Leigh Richmond, with his little flock, and the converted African, or like Paul with Philemon and the slave Onesimus, he should strive to make the several members of his church feel that they are fellow citizens, brothers and sisters of one family, members of one body, of which Jesus is the Head. This sentiment instilled among a people, will supplant the roots of bitterness and envy, and result in unusual forbearance, sympathy, and love.

But again, a Pastor should teach his people their duties to himself, as their Pastor and the servant of Christ. He may not take it for granted that they already fully understand or appreciate them. Indeed, the duties of religion are so ungenial to our natures, that we not only shrink from the observance of them, unless urged thereto by the direct appeals of truth, but even the remembrance of them fades from our view. Hence we need "line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here

a little, and there a little." Hence too, a Pastor may not presume that his people are already fully conscious of all, or even of the most simple truths that they should know. He should not shrink either, through fear of appearing self interested, or self important, from proclaiming every truth which it is God's will that they should know. He should not substitute for instructing his people upon their duties, either to God, to each other, or to himself, reproaches for their neglect of them. "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." "These things teach and exhort."

1. He should teach his people that it is their duty to support the ministry. He should shew them plainly, fully, and without shame-facedness, their duty to God, to him, and to themselves, in this respect.

(1.) From the requirements of God's Word. (2.) From his necessities and claims upon them, and (3.) From considerations of their own spiritual advancement and prosperity. Not until a pastor has faithfully expounded these principles to his people, at the same time, striving by a godly, devoted, and self-sacrificing life, to prove himself worthy of their christian confidence and support, can a minister be justified in leaving his own church for another, in order to obtain a livelihood, or even in dividing his energies in other employment, separate and apart from his sacred work.

It is to the glory of the prophets, that they uttered God's messages, even though it might result in their imprisonment, confiscation of their property, or even death; of the martyrs, that they "counted not their lives dear unto them," if even amid the fires, they might preach the unsearchable riches of Christ; and shall we who profess to be fellow-servants and joint heirs of the same Saviour; shall we who profess to be descended from a martyred line; shall we, less sorely pressed, desert the battlements their blood has stained, and looking forward to he similarly crowned, shrink from less fiery trials that they braved? "If we have run with the footmen, and they have wearied us, how shall we contend with horses; and if in a land of peace wherein we trusted they wearied us, what shall we do in the swelling of Jordan?"

If the lover of Divine truth is to effect the elevation of our churches, we must submit to become the fulcrum. We must be willing to allow the pressure to bear upon us. Oh that from the several watch towers which we occupy, we may be constrained to say, as did Hosea, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord."

2. A Pastor should teach his people to pray for him.

(1.) In consideration of their own spiritual advantage—nothing being more conducive to a profitable hearing of the word, faith excepted, than to listen to that which we have prayed might be a message from God to us. None will so eagerly drink in the promises, none so obediently hearken to the commands, none so penitently listen to the threatenings, none so submissively hear the corrections, none so humbly receive the reproofs, as those who, praying that God would direct his servants to go to His house, saying, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak."

(2.) He should teach them to pray for him, on account of his own weakness, and the greatness and importance of his work. Ministers are but men. Men are but frail, erring and sinful. God has committed the gospel treasure to earthen vessels. They are subject to all the frailties, and liable to all the failures of other men. They need constant supplies of courage, wisdom, and grace. For these it is the church's duty and privilege to pray. Moses, though endowed with divine wisdom, and superhuman power, is shown his folly at one time by an uninspired friend, remodeling his policy at his suggestion; at another time, and that too when the fate of Israel depended solely upon his endurance, he became exhausted, and required Aaron and Hur to stay his hands.

Cranmer, although a reformer and a martyr, at one time finched through the frailty of his nature, yielding the imperishable rewards of martyrdom to the weakness and indulgence of the flesh. The constant drain upon a minister's energy and endurance, is sometimes equal to, if not beyond the demands of actual martyrdom. As the apostle says, "I die daily." And again to Timothy, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." What nerve is sometimes needed to brace up the flagging energies and desponding hearts of the servants of God, and when their own spirits sink, still to brace up and comfort the people of God.

"Tis not a cause of small import
The Pastor's care demands;
But what might fill an angel's heart,
And filled a Saviour's hands."

"Who is sufficient for these things." If the apostle, converted, called and qualified for the work, and blessed in the ministry as he was, felt the necessity of the church's continual prayers, how much more the ministers of to-day—that their own souls may be enlarged, that necessary wisdom may be given to them, that divine power may rest upon them, and that a door of access may be opened for them, the churches, as much as in the apostle's time should be instructed and encouraged to pray.

"How great their work, how vast their charge;
Do thou their anxious souls enlarge;
Their best endowments are our gain,
We share the blessings they obtain."

"Brethren pray for us."