

The Joys of a Pastor's Life.

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It is a lamentable and portentous fact that the number of candidates for the gospel ministry is steadily decreasing. In one of the leading Protestant denominations they have decreased from 1,508 to 917 within the last five years. At a quite recent graduation of a class of over 200 from one of our greatest universities, about fifty declared their purpose to enter upon commercial business, about the same number were looking to the legal profession, others to the medical and scientific pursuits; but out of all the Christian students in that class only eleven announced their intention to become ministers!

Various reasons may be assigned for this sad falling off of candidates for the pulpit. These I will not discuss. My purpose is to present the golden side of the shield, and to tell young men of brains and culture and heart-pleasure what solid and substantial joys they forego when they turn away from a calling that an angel might covet. I do not underrate the need or the usefulness of godly laymen; but there are peculiar satisfactions and honors and spiritual rewards to be won by the preacher who preaches God's glorious messages to men, and the pastor who gathers and feeds and leads the Master's flocks.

In the first place, he is in a close and covetable partnership with the Lord Jesus Christ. His work is on the same lines with him who came to reveal the mind of God to sinning and suffering humanity and to "seek and to save the lost." Christ's great commission to the band of men who were in the most intimate relations with himself was, "As ye go, preach!" They were to be his witnesses, his representatives, his heralds and his ambassadors; and that is the very same commission given today to every man whom he calls into his ministry. If you ask me, "What is a call to the ministry?" I would answer that it is both the ability and the intense desire, with God's help, to preach the gospel of salvation in such a way that people will listen to you.

In addition to the joy and honor of a peculiar partnership with the incarnate Son of God, every true minister is, in the best sense of the word, a successor of the apostles. Although without this infallible inspiration and miraculous gifts, yet, like them, the faithful minister is the ambassador of the Lord Jesus. The greatest of the apostles, in addressing his spiritual children at Thessalonica exclaims, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are ye not even in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." Rising above poverty, his homelessness and his persecutions, the old hero reaches out and grasps his royal diadem. It is a crown blazing with stars—every star an immortal soul plucked from the darkness of sin into the light and liberty of a child of God and an heir of heaven! Poor, he is making many rich; he would not change place with Cæsar. My young brother when you are frightened away by foolish fears, or drawn away by worldly ambitions from the gospel ministry, have you ever thought what an apostolic companionship you are despoiling? Have you thought of what a joy and crown of rejoicing you are flinging away?

Think, too, of the glorious themes and the sublime studies that will occupy your mind as a minister of God's Word. Is human science elevating? How much more is the science of almighty God and of man's redemption, and of the unseen realities of eternity? Your themes of constant study will be themes that inspired the mighty Luthers and Wesleys and Pascals and Chalmers; you will be tutoring your soul amid those pages where John Milton fed, and amid the scenes that taught Bunyan his matchless allegory, and Jeremy Taylor his hearse-like melodies. Every nugget of fresh truth you discover will make you happier than one who has found golden spoil. The study in which a devout pastor prays and pours over God's Word, becomes an ante-chamber of the King, and he hears the cheering voice of the infinite Love, "I am with you always."

If the high range of his studies and the preparation of his discourses are so stimulating to an earnest, soul-winning pastor, he finds even richer satisfactions in his pulpit, and in his labors among his flock and the surrounding community. John Bunyan voiced the feelings of such pastors, when he said, "I have counted as if I had goodly buildings in the places where my spiritual children are born. My heart has been so wrapt up in this excellent work that I accounted myself more honored of God than if he had made me emperor of all the world or the Lord of all the glory of the earth without it. He that converteth a sinner from the error of his ways doth save a soul from death, and they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament." The young man who enters the ministry with this hunger for souls has "meat to eat that the world knows not." His purse may be scanty, his parish may be obscure; difficulties and hard work may often bring him to his knees; but while his Master owns his toils with blessings, he would not change with a Rothschild or an Astor. Every attentive auditor is a delight; and when a returning and repentant soul is led by him to the Saviour, there is not only joy in heaven, but a joy in his own heart too deep for words. It is full measure, pressed down, running over.

Converted souls are jewels in the caskets of faithful pastors; they will flash in the diadem which the righteous Judge will give them in that great day. Even here in this world, it is far better "pay" than any salary for a pastor to be told, "that sermon of yours helped me." During my fifty-five years ministry I have had an immense correspondence; but the letters that I embalm in lavender are those which express gratitude for a soul-converting sermon, or for words of uplifting consolation spoken either in the pulpit or elsewhere. "Happy the minister who is thus helped while he is helping others! He gets a small instalment of heaven in advance.

Far be it from me to pronounce the ministry a bed of roses or a hammock of luxury. A faithful, courageous pastor has trials, and not a few temptations; they often attest his fidelity, they sinew his faith and drive him closer to Christ. A winning minister is a disgrace to his calling and an abomination to the Lord. The man who finds he has mistaken his calling ought to demit the ministry at once. If the ministry were "weeded" tomorrow it would be the stronger.

But if there may be some in the pulpit who ought to be out of it, there are many out of it who ought to have gone into it. This decrease of candidates for the pulpit is a bad symptom; it shows that the thermometer is falling in the churches. It shows that ambition for money making and worldly honors is sluicing the heart of God's church and drawing much of its best talents into these greedy outlets. Unless this depletion of the ministry is checked, a woe will be pronounced upon the churches, and a gospel famine will be the penalty. My purpose in this plain article is not only to send a hailing word of good cheer to the thousands of faithful shepherds of Christ's flocks. It is to bring before Christian young men in our schools and colleges these two questions: Have I the necessary gifts, mental, physical, and spiritual for the gospel ministry? If so, can I afford to rob my Master of the service and myself of its joys?

Baptist Distinctiveness.

It is to the advantage of Baptists that no Protestant sect has so distinctive a character as they, and that no denomination can state its faith in terms so simple, so brief, and so exact.

The word "Baptist," however, is far from being ample to describe our distinctiveness. It falls short of it for the very reason that it was not originally selected for that purpose. It was meant to caricature and not to characterize a sect. It was an enemy's gratuitous appellation and not a self-chosen sobriquet, and was given to us because baptism had come to be looked upon as the meanest thing of which this despised people were guilty, and would best serve to cover them with opprobrium. So we were called "Baptists." That this word, like the cross on which our Lord suffered shame, has been transformed from disgrace into glory is not to the credit of our enemies.

"The distinctive character of Baptists" may be defined, with sufficient comprehensiveness for the present purpose, in two brief statements: (1) The Christ in the heart of every successful candidate for church membership. (2) The Bible in the hands of every church member. We take Christ for the centre and the Word of God for the circumference of our faith.

It is at once evident, therefore, that Baptists are not only a distinct people, but that their distinctiveness strikes its roots down into the fundamental matter of Christianity. The two phases which this definition touches are the Christian's life and the Christian's law. These radical principles raise us to an elevation and set us in a bolder relief in the range of religious ecclesiastical organizations of the world than the once reproachful title "Baptist" was intended to concede. Baptism is a form for which we contend, but it is not the fact which distinguishes us.

Let us examine the two statements in this definition. (1) The Christ in the heart of every successful candidate for church membership. This is the radix of the Christian doctrine. All else develops from this point. And this signals a divine rather than a human act. A mistake concerning a personal duty might in some measure be made up by a surpassing zeal in other duties, but if the ellipsis is a human act on the divine side of religious life it maims that life permanently and for all subsequent religious activity. To err at the point of the divine begetting and of the human regeneration is to err indeed, and for two to differ at this point is to differ indeed. Yet it is insistence upon this primary act that constitutes the chief Baptist peculiarity, and it is at this point that Baptist and Pedobaptist roads begin to diverge. The principal Christianizing by baptism and that of baptizing a Christian set toward opposite poles of doctrine. One opens the doors of the church to the unregenerate and ushers them in; the other closes the doors and guards them against the unregenerate. The principle which distinguishes us requires that every candidate shall personally confess, profess, and possess Christ. If all parties always respected this principle no one but a regenerate person would ever enter into church fellowship.

Of the importance of this principle to present religious conditions I need scarcely speak. No one who has looked a little into the currents that run counter to evangelical Christianity today needs persuading that, if possible, a safeguard must be found somewhere. The prevailing opposition to a pure Christianity from without—Romanistic and rationalistic error, and from within—mystic and pietistic error, to say nothing of a flagrant worldliness and a timorous Christian conviction—betoken that the times are ripe for Baptists to ring anew the changes upon their fundamental principle, that none but the spiritual progeny of God are fit candidates for church membership. "Watch the beginning of things," says the Latin proverb. The witness to the Jews to the unity of the God-head amidst the polytheism of ancient generations was scarcely more important than Baptist witness to this principle amidst the doctrinal divergences and ethical corruptions of our times.

(2) The second statement is, The Bible in the hands of every church member. By this we mean, first, the Word of God as the only law of a regenerated life. Standing with a friend on the pier at Old Point, admiring the "White Squadron" during the time of suspense in the Spanish-American War, we saw a steam launch shoot out from one of the war vessels, and soon a gallant captain stepped ashore. My friend approached him, gave the salute, and said: "Captain, what do you think of the situation?" "I don't think, sir," was the laconic reply. "But you are a man and you must think," my friend rejoined. Now pointing toward the "Olympia," the admiral's flagship, the captain concluded the interview with these words: "He does the thinking for me." The Baptist contention is that in the Word of God alone rings the tone of omnific authority.

And, second, the Bible is a sufficient written guide for a regenerated life. It sufficiently illuminates every doctrine which must be believed and every command that must be obeyed. This Word is adequate for all classes and conditions, all times and climes. It will never need any toning up or toning down to meet emergencies. Says Goethe: "Let mental culture go on advancing, let natural science go on gaining in breadth and depth, let the human mind expand as it may, it will never go beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity as it shines for it in the Gospel of Christ." Stating our principle, then, in the language of Dr. Kerr Boyce Tupper, we say, "The Bible, no additions to it, no subtractions from it, no alterations in it to the end of the world;" or, again, "The Holy Scriptures, the manual of our devotion, the oracle of our faith, the charter of our liberty, the inspiration of our life." Be it known to all men that we place this Word of our God above human creeds, above human reason, above the findings of human courts and human councils, above the human conscience itself; and that we defend it against the malicious attacks of infidelity, against the insidious approaches of tradition, against the invidious tricks of the sectarian. And this we do with a steady confidence that this Word which we defend will remain and itself be our defence when other creeds shall crumble and their devotees be confounded. Said a French infidel to a Vendean peasant, "We will pull down your churches, destroy your pictures and demolish everything that reminds you of your God."

"But you will leave us the stars?" calmly asked the assured soul. This is the day of changing and decaying creeds, but Jesus' word for it, not one jot of the law nor his word within the Old nor the New Testament shall pass away until all be fulfilled. Said an intelligent brother at one of our district associations, "Standing on the threshold of a new century, Baptists have no need to revise their creed."—J. F. Love in The Argus.

Rhetoric of Christian Science.

It was proper that the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, should issue a proclamation to her followers and to the world on the occasion of the death of President McKinley. She is reported to be a native of New Hampshire, of pure New England descent, but her memorial proclamation suggests a Hibernian strain in her ancestry not hitherto acknowledged. She says:

"Presiding over the destinies of a nation meant more to him than a mere rehearsal of aphorisms, a uniting of breaches soon to widen, a quiet assent or dissent. It began with heavy strokes, measured movements reaching from the infinitesimal to the infinite. It began warming the marble of politics into zeal according to wisdom, quenching its volcanoes, uniting the interests of all peoples, and it ended in a universal good overcoming evil." Just how his "presiding over the destinies of a nation" could "quench the volcanoes" of "the marble of politics" is not exactly clear, though it has a sonorous tone; and that same sonority appears in the "measured movements reaching from the infinitesimal to the infinite," though what it means we have not the slightest idea. Mrs. Eddy then proceeds to a prayer:

"May his history waken a tone of truth that shall reverberate, renew cuphony, emphasize humane power and bear its banner into the vast forever."

It is not wholly easy to analyze such a sentence as that, but we trust the Lord understands it. But no human mind is equal to getting clear sense out of the following:

"Through divine love the right Government is assimilated, the way pointed out, the process shortened and the joy of acquiescence consummated.—Independent.