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PASTORAL VISITATION.

AN ESSAY—BY REV. W. B. BOGGS.

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The Apostle Paul, a man of extraordinary powers, exclaimed, in view of the manifold and arduous duties of the minister of Christ, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But though the work is great and the obligation life-long, yet it should be the aim of every man who has been divinely called thereto, to realize fully all the duties required of him, and to seek for success in discharging them.

Ministerial labor may be divided into two principal branches, viz. Preaching and Visiting. A brief consideration of the latter is the object of this paper.

In the first place let us endeavour to ascertain the teaching of Scripture in reference to Pastoral visitation. Unless it appears evident that it is a positive duty devolved upon us by the most sacred obligations it will be very apt to be neglected. There may be those who do not recognize it as really belonging to the ministerial office, or else regard it as not very important.

In appealing to the word of God we find that it is rather implied in a principle than laid down in express commands. The minister of Christ lives to be the means of saving souls; that is the great object of his thoughts, efforts and prayers, and therefore he will not confine his efforts to one channel but will eagerly seek for various and frequent opportunities for presenting the gospel of the grace of God. In Paul's parting address to the Ephesian Elders he seeks to impress upon them the necessity of cleaving unto the religion which they had received, by referring to his own earnestness and constancy in communicating unto them its holy truths. He says "Ye know how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house." We can scarcely imagine any of the Apostles being contented with proclaiming the glorious gospel only on the Sabbath day. To preach Christ was their every day work, and the fact that it would not be convenient every day to gather an assembly, would lead them to seek for hearers in private.

The words "Overseer" and "Pastor" imply more than is realized by the preaching of the gospel in public only. A faithful shepherd does not merely provide pasturage for his flock, but is careful that each and all partake of it. He attends them with constant care, guides them with prudence, guards them with a watchful eye, and continually seeks their safety and comfort. So, the spiritual duties which these services represent cannot be fully discharged by simply preaching the word in public. The minister who would be a "pastor" indeed, must be acquainted with his people, not only as a class, but individually, and must ascertain their feelings, personally, on the subject of religion. He must be their faithful guide and constant friend, comforting them in sorrow, warning them in danger, and directing them in perplexity.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews when enjoining upon his readers the duty of submission to pastoral authority, enforces it by the thought that in the exercise of that authority the elders "watch for the souls" of their people "as they that must give account." These words evidently refer to a more frequent and thorough attention to the spiritual wants of a people than can be given upon one day in seven, and a more intimate acquaintance with their religious condition than can be obtained by meeting them only in the public assembly.

It is probable that those ministers who have been most successful in the Lord's

work have been the most assiduous in the discharge of this duty; and that, as a rule, those who visit most regularly and faithfully reap the largest harvest. But notwithstanding the success which rewards labor of this kind, it is doubtless regarded by some as irksome: they would far rather study and preach than visit. We must remember, however, that it is not always the most inviting labor which is the most profitable.

There are difficulties connected with this branch of ministerial service, some of which may here be pointed out.

In the first place, it is *hard work*. In order to perform it with impartiality all the families of the church and congregation should be visited; and to be made profitable in the highest degree, each individual ought to be personally addressed. In a field of considerable size this involves a great deal of toil. If one in the course of an afternoon visits five or six families, and in each one converses as far as possible with individuals, and also reads the Scriptures and offers prayer, he performs an amount of labor that exceeds the toil of an ordinary Sabbath day. And to resume the same thing the next day and the next, month after month, makes far greater demands on his energies than all his pulpit efforts.

There is another difficulty which is probably experienced by men of a studious or literary turn of mind, and those who feel the need of continually replenishing their mental resources. If they visit much they are obliged to devote time to it, which they long to employ in pursuing investigations which a course of study enabled them merely to commence. They have obtained the key to interesting and profitable departments of study, "just learned how to learn," and now are unable for want of time to proceed further with those inquiries. A thirst for knowledge was awakened which must remain ungratified. A brother often looks, it may be, upon his Hebrew Bible, an allowable study surely for a minister, and longs to read it, and obtain light on obscure passages, but it takes more time to read it than the English, and so he is obliged to let it remain on the shelf, while he hopes for better days. He purchases books, expecting to read them, but months pass away and still they are unopened. Newspapers accumulate until some violent storm keeps him in doors and gives him time to glance over them, but if the storm does not occur, and no other circumstance happens, to break the routine, and give him a little leisure, he finds himself falling far behind in a knowledge of what is transpiring in the world. To have but little or no time for reading and study, must be a sore trial to a man of intellectual vigour.

There are also some minor difficulties inherent in the work of pastoral visitation. One that must have been experienced by all is the difficulty of seeing the male members of the church and congregation. They are generally at their places of business or engaged on their farms, or elsewhere at a distance from home, and cannot be seen except in the evening, at which time the minister is engaged in religious meetings, or devoting his time to his family. It is profitable of course to visit those members of the congregation who may be seen, and converse with his children, but it is very desirable to have the head of the household and the elder sons present, to hear your instructions.

The following difficulty is probably felt only in cities and towns. On fine afternoons a minister's visits are very likely to be interrupted by what are known as fashionable calls. Any one who has experienced it knows what a hindrance it is to his religious exercises to have gay or fashionable people intruding just at the time when he may have the family collected and listening to the all-important truths of the Gospel. Of course the duty must be persevered in despite these hindrances, and if a minister accredits himself by faithfulness and constancy as a true man of God, people will in time learn the solemn object of his visits, and be careful to allow him to perform his duties without interruption.

We will now consider some of the advantages arising from the faithful performance of this work.

The primary advantage is certainly the salvation of souls. Dr. Wayland, in his "Ministry of the Gospel," makes the following statement. "So far as I have known the events that have led to conversion, I have observed, specially of late, that a much larger number has been led to reflection by private conversation than by public ministrations." After relating a conversation in which a stranger appealed to him on the subject of religion when a young man, he adds, "I was then, as I have always been, in the habit of attending preaching of the gospel; but I can remember no sermon that ever left on my mind so deep an impression as that half hour's conversation." He also finds the principal cause of success in winning souls to Christ not in greater preaching talents, nor in brilliant intellectual displays, nor in elegant writing but in devout, humble, persevering efforts, and especially in pastoral visitation. Probably the experience of every servant of Christ has led to the conviction that while the public proclamation of the Gospel is all-important, yet private appeals to individuals frequently sink deeper into the heart than other communications and lead to greater results.

It has been said by an eminent divine that "a house-going minister will make a church going people." How frequently this has been verified, when, on the first Sunday after a family has been visited which before neglected the public means of grace they have been seen occupying a place in the house of God! And in many cases if there is a falling off in their attendance a visit from the minister is all that is required to bring them back. There are two ways of filling our places of worship with hearers. One is by the exercise of eloquence and brilliant talents and the other by visiting punctually and faithfully. The employment of the former means is restricted to a favored class of which a Spurgeon, a Beecher, and a Punshon are the representatives, but the latter means are within the reach of all.

One of the most blessed possessions of a servant of Christ is the love and esteem of his people. What a solace in sorrow, what a support in toil, to have an assurance that he occupies a place in the warm affections of those to whom he ministers in holy things, and they are ready to stand by him nobly in all his difficulties! Probably the most effective means of obtaining this desirable end, is to visit them in their homes, sympathize with them in trial, manifest a sincere interest in their temporal welfare, and an anxious solicitude for their eternal happiness. People may admire a man's preaching, and, at the same time, have no heart-felt attachment to him, while, he who visits his flock, finds pleasure in their society, and is one with them without lowering the godly character of his office, will be loved and revered by them, whether he is a very acceptable preacher or not. Probably there is no part of a minister's work, the neglect of which, gives rise to so much dissatisfaction as this. How far this dissatisfaction is justifiable is a question. People often expect too much of their minister. They do not know the manifold cares and duties that divide his time. However, one of the surest ways to secure their love is to visit them.

We might also speak of the advantage to the minister himself in enabling him to preach with more life, and more direct application to the state of his people. To find out the actual condition of ones hearers, so as to become deeply interested in their spiritual state must be an invaluable preparation for the pulpit. He whose subjects and thoughts for preaching, are all obtained in the study, may produce a very good sermon, but it is not likely to be the one his people need.

In conclusion, a few suggestions may be offered in reference to the performance of this important duty.

It might be found beneficial, whenever practicable, to announce beforehand one's intention to visit in such a part of his field at a certain time. The people would thus

be expecting him, and it might often prevent other engagements, on their part, interfering with their duty to their pastor, and thereby thwarting the object of his visit.

Again, as a rule, let pastoral visits be short. This is sometimes difficult, but the advantage is manifold. In the first place, the shorter they are the more pointed they must necessarily be, and the conversation is not so apt to degenerate into gossip. The all-important subject ought to be introduced as soon as possible after entering the house in order that other and perhaps trifling ones may not preoccupy the mind. The people will thus see that their spiritual welfare is uppermost in their pastor's thoughts. Christian politeness will teach a man of refined manners to accompany his instruction with kind inquiries concerning the health and prosperity of those whom he visits, and will prevent him making his communications appear abrupt or unattractive. Wisdom is required to pursue a course between sternness on the one hand, and undue garrulity on the other. While he goes as an ambassador of Christ he must also go as a Christian friend. The Master's example teaches this. Again, the shortness of the visits will give an opportunity for a greater number, thus leaving more time at the minister's disposal for other duties. Moreover, the shorter and more animated his visits are the more they will be relished by the people.

It is not well to wait to be asked to read the Scriptures and pray. It is desirable of course for the head of the family to propose it, but if, after spending a reasonable amount of time in religious conversation, he does not, the minister should engage in the exercise without delay. The practice of some brethren in this respect renders the duty easy, and satisfactory. They carry a pocket Bible; and when ready to read they call the attention of the family to the word of truth, without being obliged to wait until doubtful search is made for a Bible or part of one which may not contain the portion they wish to read.

The Divine Word says "In the morning sow thy seed and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." In nature, the most quiet and steady influence, or forces generally produce the grandest and most abiding results. So with unostentatious, persevering efforts in this sphere of Christian labor—the results will be great as the salvation of souls, and lasting as eternity.

MANY WAYS OF DENYING CHRIST.

Bishop Heber said:—"It is a fatal mistake to suppose that there can be no apostasy from Christ where we are not absolutely called on to deny his name, or to burn incense to an idol. We deny our Lord whenever, like Demas, we through love of this present world forsake the course of duty which Christ has plainly pointed out to us. We deny our Lord whenever we lend the sanction of our countenance, our praise or even our silence, to measures or opinions which may be popular or fashionable, but which we ourselves believe to be sinful in themselves or tending to sin. We deny our Lord whenever we forsake a good man in affliction, and refuse to give countenance, encouragement and support to those who, for God's sake and for the faithful discharge of their duty, are exposed to persecution and slander."

CRYSTAL MOUNTAINS.

In the regions of perpetual winter, beautiful crystal mountains, called glaciers, are formed in vast numbers, and of remarkable size and shape.

In January, on the coast of Greenland, the sea freezes, filling the deep dark inlets of water with piles of white and glistening ice; these are increased, day after day, by the waves, as they rise and freeze around them, and dashed by strong winds up the sides of these icy mountains, rise higher and higher under the cold sky and glittering sun of the frigid zone.