

TWO LETTERS

OF THE AUTHOR TO THE REVEREND MR ROBERT ASTY OF NORWICH,
CONCERNING

THE EQUAL AUTHORITY AND POWER OF PASTOR AND
TEACHER IN A CHURCH.

THE FIRST LETTER.

REVEREND SIR,—I see you are pressed in your spirit (and it may be from the Lord) to seek my judgment in the case of your accepting or not accepting your call at Norwich to the ministry. I perceive you have given up yourself to serve Christ in the way of preaching, with good and sincere intention ; and you do only doubt, by reason of the sense of your own inability, whether you should accept of a fixed place of office to be added to that of preaching without it. To this case thus stated, I give, according to my present poor judgment, two answers : the first is, that the great sense of your own inability, though, as considered in itself, it may deter you, yet that you have this deep sense beforehand, ought to be a great encouragement to you, that God hath given you such a spirit. As in the case of profession of religion, the fears of falling away, and not being able to do anything as we ought (and twenty such discouragements), ought not nor do they finally keep any that are sincere from their profession of religion ; but (as saith one) the power and assistance of Christ they are to live upon for enabling them. Parallel to this, whether you should be a Christian or no, is whether you should be a minister or no. Sensibleness of our insufficiency is a character of such a frame of spirit as above all fits a man for the ministry ; ‘ for who is sufficient for these things,’ as of ourselves ? and wherein you are weak, you shall find yourself strong through the power of Christ that rests upon you ; for sufficiency is of God, and we are not able to think a good thought of ourselves. And with these apprehensions did Paul both enter into the ministry, and was carried on in it ; and as for your apprehensions of your gifts for the ministry, and fitness for that work, you are to take the judgment of a church that have been used to men of gifts and great gifts, now in choosing of you, and that as by the Holy Ghost ; for it is the Holy Ghost who makes overseers over the church. Therefore the church’s choice, and the promise that in what God calls a man to he will not leave him nor forsake him, may be sufficient satisfaction to you. And then besides there is a special blessing will accompany a man in an office, through the grace of God, more than doth in his ordinary preaching without office. I use to say the loadstone doth draw,

but especially if it be set in steel, 1 Cor. xii. 28, 1 Tim. iii. 15. Sir, I should advise this concerning him that is to be joined with you in office, endeavour to observe by all ways you can his temper of spirit, not as to religion (I suppose sincerity and ability to be in him), but as to his carriage, his natural temper. There are oftentimes very great burdens upon men's spirits that are yoked together, and breaches from unsuitableness of spirit do often fall out into sad events in churches.—The man is utterly a stranger to me.—You know the sad events between Paul and Barnabas; there was a selfishness in Barnabas to have Mark go with them. He was his sister's son, and though Barnabas was a good man, an apostle, yet he stuck unto his selfish end so much, he was so pertinacious in it, that it caused a breach to part, and they never met again that we read of; and Paul was in the right. I heard since you wrote to me, as if there were some discouragements that you have besides them that you wrote, which I must leave wholly to yourself. But if you be yoked with your own consent, you are irrevocable; but yet you are free as to your own consent, and you have as great a freedom on your part to accept or not, as the church had of choosing on their part.

For your other query, of the equality or inequality of power in the office of a pastor and a teacher, and of their administrations, wherein they differ. For the first, I know no difference of superiority, and the apostle condemned it in Diotrephes, 3 John ver. 9, of one above the other, they are prophesying elders both: Eph. iv. 11, 'Some pastors and teachers;' they are yoked together alike, whereas the former are single, 'some apostles, some prophets, and some evangelists.' These being extraordinary ministers, they may admit subordination, as an evangelist was under and lower than the office of an apostle; but these two are yoked together in one, 'some pastors and teachers.' They that labour in the word and doctrine are to have double honour alike; there is not a third honour to be given to one above the other. The 65th and 66th chapters of Isaiah are promises of all the last and best times of the gospel, which ver. 22 shews sufficiently, and their worship is spoken in ver. 23, their officers in the 21st, whereof there were two sorts in general, priests and Levites. The Levites were those that helped about sacrifices, and were under the priests, but the priests were equal; and who are the priests but those whose lips preserve knowledge? For the substance of their office they were co-ordinate officers, not subordinate, as the Levites to the priests. Answerably in Rom. xii., where the officers of a church are set out at the 6th verse, and so on to the 9th, he says, 'Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us,' for ministerial gifts are always suited, and then he divides them first into two generals: 1, prophecy; 2, ministry. He speaks of ordinary officers. Those that have to prophesy have to do with matters of faith: 'Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith given us; or ministry, 'Let us wait on our ministry.' Then he comes to subdivide these into these particulars: first, 'he that teacheth, to attend on teaching,' as upon an office; 'he that exhorteth, on exhortation.' Those are the particulars belonging to prophecy; and as *pastor* is set before *teacher* in the Ephesians, here *teacher* is set before *pastor*; so that, comparing one with another, I make them equal with those offices that belong to the ministry. The other generals are three, as it follows, and are lower and under: 'he that giveth,' and 'he that ruleth,' and 'that sheweth mercy.' You may see this opened at large by Mr Cotton in *The Way of the Churches of New England*. This for the equality; only I say this, as to the highest of their work, which is the word and prayer, they are both equal.

For the second. For the difference in their administrations, this is one principle with me, that the distinction of officers arises from the distinction

of gifts God doth give unto men fitted for office, and I found it upon 1 Cor. xii. 4-6, 'There are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations,' successes of God's working upon men's hearts, that is, from God the Father. All three persons are interested in the ministry as well as in our salvation. The gifts are what the Holy Ghost gives, and endows a man habitually withal, and they are divers. The administrations are offices appointed by the Lord Christ the great Shepherd, and there are differences of administrations suited for the difference of exercise of gifts. And, thirdly, the success is from God the Father, who is the God of all grace and the founder of all, as the 6th verse has it. Now the diversity of gifts for teacher and for pastor are as apparent, and that before called to office, which is suited to these diversities of gifts, habitually given by the Holy Ghost, as Jesus Christ appointed offices; and happy is the man that is a minister that is called to that kind of office which his gifts suits, for then they will run in a more natural channel. The diversity of gifts by the Holy Ghost doth appear. Some more comparatively have a powerful way of exhorting, persuading, working upon the affections, and abound in uses; others have a gift of handling things in a doctrinal way, to open and fetch out the true meaning and sense of Scripture, which often needs an acuteness to find out, and to give reasons for the proof of a thing, an ability to answer objections and untie knots, have a good judgment in controversies, yet both may have ability either way, but with a disproportion one more than the other. Answerably in that Rom. xii. of the prophesying officers, one is an exhorter, to bend himself to exhortation; and exhortation is put for comfort, and for like reason for reproof, and for what is directly practical. And the teacher he has ability to establish men's hearts in truth, and they are to bend themselves accordingly: 'he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that teacheth, on teaching.' 1 Cor. xii. 8, 'To one is given wisdom, to another knowledge, by the same Spirit;' these are meant plainly of ordinary gifts. That which follows in the 9th verse is healing, and those that are extraordinary. Thus also that place in Timothy is understood by some of preaching officers that are worthy of double honour, that labour in the word, that is, of exhortation, and that labour in doctrine; and some have stretched the difference to be set out by that scheme of a church in Rev. iv. of the four beasts; the fourth was like an eagle, that has an eagle's eye into truths, &c.

Thus, Sir, I have given you my thoughts that I have at present (for my notes about church government at present are not with me, being I am removing). With my love remembered to you, and prayers to guide you, I rest, your very affectionate friend and brother in Christ,

THO. GOODWIN.

LONDON, *March the 25th 1675.*

THE SECOND LETTER.

REVEREND SIR,—I received your important letter about two months since, which was time enough to have answered it if opportunity had served; but truly I have been weak and sickish ever since, and my eyes fail me that I cannot write myself, so much as to set down my own thoughts and private studies: and, besides, I did suppose that you had the strength of what I could say in that letter I wrote you by Mr Berman, which yourself says in your last satisfied you so much, that I thought I needed to write no more,

or if I did, I should but fall into the same thoughts again. But you having now revived it in your letters to the elders in general, and therein required my cognisance, I strain myself to write again.

This controversy about the authority and power of pastor and teacher was first started among the Brownist churches in Holland, by Francis Johnson, one of the rigid separation, who out of the Old Testament went about to prove the government by pastors and teachers under the New to be conformed to the analogy of the Old, and so to make a pastor in a congregational church to be as a high priest; but, as I remember, it took not with his brethren. This book I have either lost, or it was burnt in the fire of London, else I would send it you.

The arguments in my present thoughts, to prove that the pastor and teachers are equal in power (which is the particular point of which you inquire), are such as these.

1. The first is taken from what the apostle says, 1 Cor. iv. 1, 'Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.' 1. He speaks it of the preaching elders of the New Testament, the ordinary ministers of the word. 2. He speaks what esteem they are to have according to their order and rank from all men, and then much more from the church over which they are placed. 3. He speaks universally of all such as are the ministers to such churches: 'Let a man so account of us,' &c.

Now their office in common to them all is to be stewards of Christ and of the mysteries of God, whereby the sacraments are especially intended, as well as the dispensation of the word and prayer. For the sacraments are, in a figurative signification, the person of Christ himself, and in a special manner mysteries; and the ancients did usually and generally term them mysteries; and accordingly that place, Eph. v. 32, 'This is a great mystery,' is interpreted by them a great sacrament; and thereupon the papists, who are the great pretenders to antiquity, have made marriage a sacrament to this day; but that scripture is genuinely meant of Christ and his church, as appears by the words spoken after.

2. When our Saviour Christ did institute the new ministry of the gospel in the room of the old, he first chose twelve apostles, who were the extraordinary ministers of the New Testament; and besides those, he sent out seven disciples to preach the gospel, and sent them two by two, one having like authority and equality with the other. And these are, as Bishop Andrews doth interpret it rightly, the standing ordinary ministers of congregations.

3. When Christ at last, afore his ascension, gave authority to go preach the gospel, and teach all nations, with the same breath he gives them authority to administer the sacraments, Go and baptize as well as preach the word. The commission was for the sacraments and word together, and for one sacrament as well as another, so as the administration of these are of like extent, as occasion is; and correspondently to this, the apostle Paul, Eph. iv. 10, 11, confirms it: 'When he ascended up on high,' says he, 'and gave gifts unto men, he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists.' These are extraordinary ministers in those times of differing degrees and order each particular of them, and therefore each particular is distinguished by the word *some*. And then he specifies the ordinary standing ministers that were to continue in all ages to the end of the world; 'pastors and teachers,' about whom the present question is. Now observe the difference he puts. Indeed, the word *some* is set before pastors and teachers, to distinguish them from the extraordinary he had spoken of afore, and to shew they were of another rank than the former. But observe again

that he puts no such difference between the pastors and teachers; he doth not say, *some pastors*, and *some teachers*.* He doth not place the word *some* afore each, as he had done afore, but says only *pastors and teachers*, to shew they are of equal commission and rank.

4. I might here add that grand record, Rom. xii., which the apostle Paul left behind him, on purpose as it were to check the pride of the church of Rome (which the Holy Ghost foresaw would be the mistress of misrule), and to prevent that disorder of officers in the church rising unto that grandeur, to which the Roman clergy have ascended, of thrones and dominions, &c., and to depress and suppress all such attempts in those officers. The Holy Ghost left a scheme of those several officers and works of them, first dividing their functions into two heads, ver. 6, 7, prophecy and ministry, and then subdividing them into particulars, that 'he who teacheth should wait on teaching,' ver. 7. There is one preaching elder, your teacher; and 'he that exhorteth on exhortation,' there is your pastor; and these two particulars come under that first head of prophecy; and they that do so are the two preaching elders, as appears by the following words, 'Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.' So as matters of faith are the subject matter and work of their two offices; and then follows the three other particular officers which are to be reduced under the other general head of ministry, or *διακονία*, which are the inferior officers. 'He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity,' which we call the deacon; 'he that ruleth, with diligence,' the ruling elder is meant; 'he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness,' which intends looking to the sick and infirm, which is a nauseating work. And if any object that this office of shewing mercy runs in the language of the masculine gender, I answer,

(1.) Whether it be a man or woman who undertakes the work, it is all one.

(2.) The apostle had begun the enumeration of these officers in the masculine gender.

(3.) It is to be considered, that in all the other particular offices he mentions, the officers thereof are males, and therefore at the last he continues the same gender, noting out a person, to keep to the analogy of the language with which he had begun. This chapter I thus opened in the assembly, but you may see it more largely in Mr Cotton's *Treatise of the Way of the Churches in New England*.

5. Consider what the apostle says, 1 Tim. v. 17, 'Let the elders that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.' The apostle's scope is to set the differing valuation that churches were to put upon their officers for their works' sake, and he puts a special note upon the preaching elders that labour in the word and doctrine. The difference he puts is only between them and the ruling elders; but he yokes them, viz., the pastor and teacher together, as co-ordinate and of like rank, for their works' sake; yea (and as I have thought), with a distinction of their offices, intimated in those phrases, 'that labour,' namely, in the 'word' of exhortation, which is the pastor's office (it is the apostle's phrase elsewhere), and 'in doctrine,' which the teacher is to apply himself to.

6. The several gifts God gives (which are suited to offices, and officers to them) do warrant this distinction. Thus, in 1 Cor. xii., he discourses of the several gifts and offices of those that are the eminent members of the body; and by helps in government, ver. 28, I understand the ruling elder assisting their teachers. In the fore part of the chapter, ver. 4-6, he shews how God

* See Ainsworth's Discourse on the Ministry, in 4to.

has given gifts (that is, infused habits), and they are suited to offices, and both blessed by God.

Now, among those gifts fitting men for those administrations and operations, 'to one is given a word of wisdom,' which is more proper to a pastor; 'to another a word of knowledge,' that is for the teacher, which is a gift more speculative. And you may find in experience, that some men's gifts are more for exhortation, and to set home uses; others to invent reasons for proofs and explanations of truths. And look into your auditors, and you will find some to affect a ministry that moves and persuades their affections, and stirs their wills; and you will find others that affect depths of knowledge, and each profiteth by either, for that is the rule, 1 Cor. xiii. 7. The ministration of the Spirit in all these administrations is given to every man to profit withal; and thus harmoniously doth one thing answer, and is suited to another, and by these God shews his care and wisdom, by several gifts and offices suited to men's needs and spirits, and shews his love in making provision for the defects and wants that are in his poor saints. The teacher has the care of their understandings, to cure the errors and defects therein; and the pastor has their wills and affections principally committed to his charge, to work upon and move them; and which of these you will prefer most in man, the will or understanding to be the more principal faculty, you may by the same measure give dignity to these officers for their work sake.

7. God further shews he has a care of men's lives and conversations, in setting up the ruling elder to watch over their conversations, for that is his charge. God shews his care over their bodies and estates, in appointing the office of a deacon to look to their wants; and he takes care of their bodily infirmities, by appointing them that are to shew mercy. And thus God has taken care for all about his people, both for his own honour, and their good who are his children. He hath sufficiently provided for their education in this world, till they come to heaven. As persons that are great kings and princes have several offices for every business, though very small, and they have them to shew their greatness, so Christ will have the like too in his church.

Let these things be sufficient to answer this my scope and design, and to prove that these two offices of pastor and teacher, and their gifts and labours, are co-ordinate in respect of preference of one to the other, or dependence of the one upon the other, much more are they freed from any subjection of one unto the other. So that to advance one above the other is an apparent violation of the sacred order which God has instituted and fixed, and is an injurious usurpation out of ignorance and pride, such as was in Diotrephes, whom the apostle John so condemns. The breaking of churches will be hazarded if this principle prevail; and let any man take heed how he defile the temple of God, much more destroy it, for him God will destroy.

I am, yours, &c.,

THO. GOODWIN.

POSTSCRIPT.

I intended by my letter to take away all precedency whatsoever, and my reasons do manifestly tend to it, and therefore I make it my conclusion; and those words in respect of preference, are all one as if I had said in respect of precedency.