

SERMON V.*

And I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.—Jer. iii. 15.

ALL the names of the officers of the church under the New Testament have a double signification, a general and more large signification, and a special signification. As for instance, *διάκονος*, a 'deacon,' hath a general signification; it signifies any minister or servant: and it hath a special signification, when it denotes that peculiar officer, which was instituted in the church, to take care of the poor. And so the name of a pastor hath a more general, and a more special signification. In general, it signifies any teacher or officer in the church, ordinary or extraordinary; in special, it signifies that peculiar officer in the church, which, as such, is distinguished from a teacher. 'He gave some to be pastors and teachers;' Eph. iv. 11. For there is a distinction between pastor and teacher, not as to degree, but as to order. I do not use the distinction in the sense of those who make bishops and presbyters differ in degree, but not in order; but it is a distinction as to that beautiful order, which Christ hath instituted in his church. Christ hath instituted a beautiful order in his church, if it were discovered and improved. And I have wished sometimes, I could live to see it; but I do not think I shall. Yet this I would recommend to my brethren, as the way to discover the order of Christ in the church; and there is no way to discover it, but by the harmony that there is between gifts, office, and edification. The original of all church order and rule is in gifts; the exercise of those gifts is by office; the end of all those gifts and offices is edification.

Now, I believe, I can demonstrate, that all ordinary spiritual gifts, that Christ hath given to his church, are reducible to four heads, and all of them are for the exercise of

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these gifts; for they must all be exercised distinctly. Herein you will find out the beautiful order of Christ in the church, and not else. I say, all gifts may be reduced to four heads. The one head of these gifts is to be exercised by the pastor; one head by the teacher; one by the ruler; and one by the deacon: and all these gifts, exercised by all these officers, answer all ends for the edification of the church. For it is a vain opinion, that the rule and conduct of Christ's church is either in one, or in all. There is nothing in what I have declared, but what is the design of the apostle in Rom. xii. 6—8. Let us study that harmony more, and we shall find more of the beauty and glory of it.

I shall speak of these pastors mentioned here in the text; and I shall speak of them in general, as all teaching officers in the church, which is the general signification of the word. And all that I shall speak of them is, to remind myself, and my brethren, and you, of somewhat of the duty of such a pastor; what is incumbent on him; what is expected from him. Now I do not design to go through all the necessary duties of a pastor or teacher; I only design to give some instances.

First, The duty of such an officer of the church,* a pastor, teacher, elder of the church, is that mentioned in the text, 'to feed the church with knowledge and understanding.' This feeding is by preaching of the gospel. He is no pastor, who doth not feed his flock. It belongs essentially to the office; and that not now and then (according to the figure and image that is set up of the ministry in the world, a dead idol) as occasion serves. But the apostle saith, Acts vi. 4. 'We will give ourselves continually to the word. It is to labour in the word and doctrine;' 1 Tim. v. 17. to make all things subservient to this work of preaching and instructing the church; to do it in that frame the apostle mentions, in Col. i. 28. he speaks of his preaching, and the design of his preaching, 'whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.' How doth he do it? 'Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which work-

* It is proper to inform the reader, that several things in this sermon are to be found in Dr. Owen's 'True Nature of a Gospel Church,' chap. v.

eth in me mightily.' There is not one word in our translation, that answers the emphasis of the original words; 'Whereunto I labour,' *Εἰς ὃ καὶ κοπιῶ*. *Κοπιῶ* is to labour with diligence and intention, with weariness and industry. I labour, 'usque ad fatigationem,' to the spending of myself. Striving, *ἀγωνιζόμενος*; striving as a man that runs in a race; or striving as a man that wrestles for victory; as men did in their public contests. And how? *κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ*, according to the effectual, in-working, or inward operation of him, *ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοὶ*, who does effectually work in me. We cannot reach the emphasis by any words in our language. And how is all this? *ἐν δυνάμει*, with mighty power. Here is the frame of the apostle's spirit: it should give dread to us in the consideration of it. I labour diligently, I strive as in a race, I wrestle for victory, by the mighty in-working power of Christ working in me, and that with great and exceeding power.

What I shall do is, to shew you, in some instances, what is required unto this work of teaching, or of feeding the congregation with knowledge and understanding, in this duty of preaching the word.

1. There is spiritual wisdom in understanding the mysteries of the gospel, that we may be able to declare the whole counsel of God, and the riches and treasures of the grace of Christ unto the souls of men. See Acts xx. 27. 1 Cor. ii. 1—4. Eph. iii. 7—9. Many, in the church of God, were, in those days of light, growing and thriving; they had a great insight into spiritual things, and into the mysteries of the gospel. The apostle prays, that they might all have it; Eph. i. 17, 18. 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, might give unto you the spirit of wisdom, and revelation in the knowledge of him. The eyes of your understanding being enlightened: that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.'

Really, it is no easy thing for ministers to instruct to such kind of duties. If there be not some degree of eminency in themselves, how shall we lead on such persons as these to perfection? We must labour ourselves to have a thorough knowledge of these mysteries, or we shall be use-

less to a great part of the church. There is spiritual wisdom and understanding in the mysteries of the gospel required hereunto.

2. Authority is required. What is authority in a preaching ministry? It is a consequent of unction, and not of office. The scribes had an outward call to teach in the church, but they had no unction, no anointing, that could evidence they had the Holy Ghost in his gifts and graces. Christ had no outward call, but he had an unction; he had a full unction of the Holy Ghost in his gifts and graces for the preaching of the gospel. Hereon there was a controversy about his authority. The scribes say unto him, Mark xi. 28. 'By what authority dost thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?' The Holy Ghost determines the matter. Matt. vii. 29. 'He preached as one having authority, and not as the scribes.' They had authority of office, but not of unction; Christ only had that. And preaching in the demonstration of the Spirit, which men quarrel so much about, is nothing less than the evidence, in preaching, of unction, in the communication of gifts and grace unto them for the discharge of their office: for it is a vain thing for men to assume and personate authority. So much evidence as they have of unction from God in gifts and grace, so much authority they have, and no more in preaching: and let every one then keep within his bounds.

3. Another thing required hereunto, is experience of the power of the things we preach to others. I think truly, that no man preaches that sermon well to others, that doth not first preach it to his own heart. He who doth not feed on, and digest, and thrive by what he prepares for his people, he may give them poison as far as he knows; for, unless he finds the power of it in his own heart, he cannot have any ground of confidence, that it will have power in the hearts of others. It is an easier thing to bring our heads to preach, than our hearts to preach. To bring our heads to preach, is but to fill our minds and memories with some notions of truth of our own or other men, and speak them out to give satisfaction to ourselves and others: this is very easy. But to bring our hearts to preach, is to be transformed into the power of these truths; or to find the power of them both before, in fashioning our minds and hearts,

and in delivering of them, that we may have benefit; and to be acted with zeal for God, and compassion to the souls of men. A man may preach every day in the week, and not have his heart engaged once. This hath lost us powerful preaching in the world, and set up, instead of it, quaint orations; for such men never seek after experience in their own hearts: and so it is come to pass, that some men's preaching, and some men's not preaching, have lost us the power of what we call the ministry: that, though there be twenty or thirty thousand in orders, yet the nation perishes for want of knowledge, and is overwhelmed in all manner of sins, and not delivered from them unto this day.

4. Skill to divide the word aright. This skill to divide the word aright, is practical wisdom, in considering the word of God, to take out not only that which is substantial food for the souls of men, but what is meet food for them to whom we preach: and that,

5. Requires the knowledge and consideration of the state of our flocks. He who hath not the state of his flock continually in his eye, and in his mind in his work of preaching, fights uncertainly, as a man beating the air. If he doth not consider what is the state of his flock, with reference to temptations, in reference to their light, or to their darkness, to their growth or to their decays, to their flourishing or to their withering, to the measure of their knowledge and attainments; he who doth not duly consider these things, never preaches aright unto them.

6. There is required too, that we be acted by zeal for the glory of God, and compassion to the souls of men.

Having spoken these few plain words, I may say, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' There is required, that spiritual wisdom which is necessary to understand the mysteries of the gospel, able to instruct and lead on to perfection the most grown in our congregation; that authority, which proceeds from unction, and is an evidence of an anointing with the graces and gifts of the Spirit, which alone gives authority in preaching; that experience which conforms our whole souls into every sermon we preach, so as to feel the truth in the power of it; that skill whereby to divide the word aright, &c. Hence we see we have great need to pray for ourselves, and that you should pray for us. Pray for

your ministers. This then is the first duty required of gospel ministers.

Secondly, Another duty required is, continual prayer for the churches over which Christ hath made them overseers. I have not time to confirm these things by particular testimonies: you know how often the apostle expresses it of himself, and enjoins it unto others, continually to pray for the flock.

I will name four reasons why we ought to do so, and four things we ought to pray for.

1. My first reason is, because I believe that no man can have any evidence in his own soul, that he doth conscientiously perform any ministerial duty towards his flock, who doth not continually pray for them. Let him preach as much as he will, visit as much as he will, speak as much as he will, unless God doth keep up in him a spirit of prayer in his closet and family for them, he can have no evidence that he doth perform any other ministerial duty in a due manner, or that what he doth is accepted with God. I speak to them who are wise, and understand these things.

2. This is the way whereby we may bless our congregations.

Authoritative blessing, as far as I know, is taken from us. There is only that which is euctical and declarative, left to us. Pronouncing the blessing is only euctical and declarative, and not authoritative. Now there is no way whereby we can bless our flock by institution, but by a continual praying for a blessing upon them.

3. If men are but as they used to be, I do not believe any minister, any pastor in the world, can keep up a due love to his church, who doth not pray for them. He will meet with so many provocations, imprudences, and miscarriages, that nothing can keep up his heart with inflamed love towards them, but by praying for them continually. That will conquer all prejudices, if he continues so doing. And,

4. My last reason is this, In our prayers for our people, God will teach us what we shall preach unto them. We cannot pray for them, but we must think on what it is we pray for, and that is the consideration of their condition; and therein God teaches the ministers of the gospel. If it be so with them, this is that they should teach them. The

more we pray for our people, the better shall we be instructed what to preach to them. The apostles, to take us off from all other occasions, 'gave themselves to prayer and the word;' Acts. vi. 4. Prayer is in the first place. It is not personal, but ministerial prayer for the church, and the progress of the gospel.

What shall we pray for?

1. For the success of the word that we preach unto them. This falls in with the light of nature. We are to pray for the success of the word unto all the ends of it; and that is for all the ends of living unto God, for direction to duty, for instruction in the truth, for growth in grace, for all things whereby we may come to the enjoyment of God. We should pray, that all these ends may be accomplished in our congregations, in the dispensation of the word, or else we sow seed at random, which will not succeed merely by our sowing; for let the husbandman break up the fallow ground and harrow it, and cast in the seed, unless showers come, he will have no crop; in like manner, after we have cast the seed of the gospel, though the hearts of men are prepared in some measure, unless there come the showers of the Spirit upon them, there will be no profiting. Therefore let us pray, that a blessing might be upon the word. The ministers of the word preach, and would be accepted with the people; take this 'arcanum' of it, pray over it, and it is the only way to have it accepted in the hearts of the people: Follow it on with prayer.

2. We are to pray for the presence of Christ in all our assemblies; for this is that whereon depends all the efficacy of the ordinances of the gospel. Christ hath given us many promises of it, and we are to act in faith concerning it, and to pray in faith for it in our assemblies, which is a great ministerial duty; and if we do it not, we are ignorant of our duty, and are willing to labour in the fire, where all must perish; we fight at hazard, for all the efficacy of the ordinances of preaching, and praying, doth not depend upon any thing in ourselves, of our gifts, notions, parts, fervency, but it depends only upon the presence of Christ. Make this your business to pray mightily for it in the congregation, to make all these effectual.

3. Our prayers should be with respect unto the state

and condition of the church. It is supposed, he that is a minister is satisfied he hath some measure of understanding and knowledge in the mysteries of the gospel, that he is able to conduct the best of the congregation unto salvation; that he knows their measure, their weakness, and their temptations; that he knows the times and seasons in which they are exercised and exposed, whether times of adversity or prosperity; and, as far as possible, knows how it is with their persons. And we ought to suit our prayers according to all we know concerning them, and be satisfied in it, that Christ himself will come in to recover them who are fallen, to establish them who stand, to heal them who do backslide, to strengthen them who are tempted, to encourage them who are running and pressing forward to perfection, to relieve them who are disconsolate and in the dark: and we have of all these sorts in our churches. And our prayers should be for a communication of supplies unto them, continually in all these cases.

Thirdly, It is incumbent on men who are pastors and teachers of churches, to preserve the truth and doctrine of the gospel, that is committed to the church, to keep it entire, and defend it against all opposition. See the weighty words wherewith the apostle gives this in charge unto Timothy, 1 Tim. vi. 20. 'O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust.' And, 2 Tim. i. 14. 'That good thing,' *τὴν καλὴν παρακαταθήκην*, 'that good depositum,' that good treasure, 'that is committed to thee, keep by the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth in us.' This charge is given to all of us who are ministers, keep the truth, that good, that blessed thing. 'It is,' saith the apostle, 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God, that is committed to my trust;' 1 Tim. i. 11. And it is committed to all our trust; and we are to keep it against all opposition. The church is the ground and pillar of truth, to hold up, and declare the truth in and by its ministers. But is that all? No; 'The church is like the tower of David made for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men;' Cant. iv. 4. The ministers of the gospel are shields and bucklers to defend the truth against all adversaries and opposers. The church hath had thousands of bucklers and shields of mighty men, or else the truth had been lost. They are not only to declare it in

the preaching of the gospel; but to defend and preserve it against all opposition; to hold up the shield and buckler of faith against all opposers.

But what is required hereunto?

1. There is required a clear apprehension in ourselves of those doctrines and truths which we are so to defend. Truth may be lost by weakness as well as by wickedness: if we have not a full apprehension of the truth, and that upon its own proper grounds and principles, we shall never be able to defend it. This is to be attained by all ways and means, by the use especially of diligent prayer and study, so that we may be able to stop the mouth of gainsayers.

2. There is required love of the truth. We shall never contend earnestly for the truth, we shall never 'buy it and not sell it,' whatever we know of it, unless our love and value of it arise from a sense and experience of it in our own souls. I fear there is much loss of truth, not for want of light, knowledge, and ability, but for want of love.

I have the advantage of most here present in this, that I know the contest we had for the truths of the gospel, before our troubles began, and was an early person engaged in them; and knew those godly ministers that did contend for them as for their lives and souls; and that all the opposition that was made against them, was never able to discourage them. What were these doctrines? the doctrines of eternal predestination, effectual conversion to God, and the obduration of wicked reprobates by the providence of God. These truths are not lost for want of skill, but for want of love. We scarce hear one word of them; we are almost ashamed to mention them in the church; and he that doth it will be sure to expose himself to public obloquy and scorn: but we must not be ashamed of truth. Formerly we could not meet with a godly minister, but the error of Arminianism was looked upon by him as the ruin and poison of the souls of men: such did tremble at it, wrote and disputed against it. But now it is not so; the doctrine of the gospel is owned still, though little taken notice of by some among ourselves, the love of it being greatly decayed, the sense and the power of it almost lost; but we have got no ground by it; we are not more holy, more fruitful than we were in the preaching those doctrines, and attending diligently unto them.

3. Let us take heed in ourselves of any inclination to novel opinions, especially in, or about, or against such points of faith, as those wherein they who are gone before us and are fallen asleep, found life, comfort, and power. Who would have thought that we should have come to an indifferency as to the doctrine of justification, and quarrel and dispute about the interest of works in justification, about general redemption, which takes off the efficacy of the redeeming work of Christ, and about the perseverance of the saints; when these were the soul and life of them who were gone before us, who found the power and comfort of them. We shall not maintain these truths unless we find the same comfort in them as they did. I have lived to see great alterations in the godly ministers of the nation, both as to zeal and value of those important truths, that were as the life of the reformation; and the doctrine of free-will condemned in a prayer, bound up in the end of your bibles: but now it is grown an indifferent thing, and the horrible corruptions we suffer to be introduced in the doctrine of justification, have weakened all the vitals of religion. Let us, for the remainder of our days, 'buy the truth and sell it not;' and let us be zealous and watchful over any thing that should arise in our congregations.

Bring one man into the congregation who hath a by-opinion, and he shall make more stir about it than all the rest of the congregation, in building up one another in their most holy faith. Take heed lest there be men arising from ourselves, speaking perverse things; which is to make way for grievous wolves to break in and tear and rend the flock.

4. There is skill and ability required hereunto, to discover and be able to oppose and confound the cunning sophistry of the adversaries. Great prayer, watchfulness, and diligence are required, that we may be able to attend unto these things. And those who are less skilled, may do well to advise with those who are more exercised in them, to give them help and assistance.

Lastly, I shall mention one duty more that is required of pastors and teachers in the church, and that is, that we labour diligently for the conversion of souls. This work is committed to them. I should not mention this, but to rec-

tify a mistake in some. The end of all particular churches, is the calling and edification of the catholic church. Christ hath not appointed his ministers to look unto themselves only; they are to be the means of calling and gathering the elect in all ages: and this they principally are to do by their ministry. I confess there are other outward ways and means whereby men have been, and may be converted. I find by long observation, that common light, in conjunction with afflictions, do begin the conversion of many, without this or that special word: and persons may be converted to God by religious conference. There may be many occasional conversions wrought by the instrumentality of men, who have real spiritual gifts for the dispensation of the word, and are occasionally called thereunto. But principally this work is committed unto the pastors of churches, for the conversion of souls. Take this observation, the first object of the word is the world. Our work is the same with the apostles, the method directly contrary; the apostles had a work committed to them, and this was their method: the first work committed to the apostles was the convincing and converting sinners to Christ among Jews and Gentiles; to preach the gospel, to convert infidels; this they accounted their chief work. Paul made nothing of administering the ordinance of baptism, in comparison of it. 'Christ did not send me,' saith he, 'to baptize, but to preach the gospel;' 1 Cor. i. 17. In comparison, I say, preaching was their chief work. And then, their second work was to teach these disciples to do and observe whatever Christ commanded them, and to bring them into church order; this was their method. Now the same work is committed unto the pastors of churches, but in a contrary method. The first object of our ministry is the church; to build up and edify the church. But what then? Is the other part of the work taken away, that they should not preach to convert souls? God forbid. There be several ways whereby they who are pastors of churches do preach to the conversion of souls. 1. When other persons that are unconverted do come where they are preaching to their own congregations (whereof we have experience every day), they are there converted to God by the pastoral discharge of their duty. No, say some, they preach

to the church as ministers, to others only as spiritually gifted. But no man can make this distinction in his own conscience. Suppose there be five hundred in this place, and a hundred of this church; can you make the distinction, that I am preaching in a double capacity, to some as a minister, and to others not as a minister? Neither rule, nor reason, nor natural light expresses any thing to that purpose. We preach as ministers to those to whom we preach, for the conversion of their souls. 2. Ministers may preach for the conversion of souls, when they preach elsewhere occasionally. They preach as ministers wherever they preach. I know the indelible character is a figment; but the pastor's office is not such a thing as men may leave at home when they go abroad. It is not in a minister's own power, unless lawfully dismissed or deposed, to hinder him from preaching as a minister. And it is the duty of particular churches (one end of their institution being the calling and gathering the catholic church), to part with their officers for a season, when called to preach in other places for the converting souls to Christ. We had a glorious ministry in the last age; wonderful instruments for the conversion of souls. Did they convert them as gifted men, and not as ministers? God forbid. I say, it may be done by them who have received gifts, and not called to office. But I know no ground any man hath to give up himself to the constant exercise of ministerial gifts; and not say to the Lord in prayer, 'Lord, here am I, send me.'

Had I time and strength, I should tell you of the duty of pastors and teachers in administering of the seals; and what is required thereunto.

And their duty in directing and comforting the consciences of all sorts of believers. What prudence, purity, condescension and patience are required in it, as a great part of our ministerial duty.

I should shew you also their duty in the rule of the church. Not that ever Christ intended to commit the rule of the church to them alone, to take them off from that great and important duty of preaching the gospel; but as time and occasions will allow them, to attend to the rule of the church.

And lastly, in exemplary conversation; and in assembling with other churches of their order, for the managing church communion.

‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ Pray, pray for us; and God strengthen us, and our brother, who hath been called this day to the work; it may not be unuseful to him and me, to be mindful of these things, and to beg the assistance of our brethren.