

THE TRANSFORMED PASTOR

BY

RICHARD BAXTER

A MODERN VERSION IN EASIER ENGLISH

BY GEOFFREY STONIER

INTRODUCTION

Dear fellow pastors and preachers,

In the process of writing a short course on the Spiritual Principles of Pastoral Leadership for Third World countries, and delivering them as a series of lectures in India and Africa at several seminars for pastors and preachers, I came to realise that my thoughts over 47 years of ministry had been profoundly influenced by the lectures of Richard Baxter in his book, written long ago, but still applicable today, entitled THE REFORMED PASTOR. The result was to cause me to render Baxter's book into easier English, keeping all the fire and eloquence of the original.

To say the least, reactions to my lectures were mixed, as indeed Baxter found with his lectures, although physical weakness prevented him from delivering them all. It was obvious that in the England of the 17th and 18th Centuries, many pastors and preachers were not true believers, or were not spiritually prepared for the rigors of the ministry that they sincerely felt called to take up. It was indeed true in Baxter's day.

To the subject of Pastor Leadership, Baxter adds pastoral unity, preaching, evangelism, personal work, and counselling. I am sure you will be blessed as you read his wise words.

For many, the principles that govern the lives of many pastors and church leaders are not spiritual, but worldly. May Baxter's lectures be a great challenge to us all as we stand before the bar of Holy Scripture, where God makes it crystal clear what sort of leadership he expects in his Church - the Church in which Christ remains the Leader, and the Church for which Christ shed his blood.

Yours in the love and bonds of the ministry in the preaching of the gospel,

Geoffrey Stonier

(International Director of Preachers' Help Ministries)

DEDICATION TO THE REFORMED PASTOR

BY RICHARD BAXTER

I write this to my dearly beloved brothers, and faithful ministers of Christ. May grace and peace be increased in you through our Lord Jesus Christ!

REVEREND BROTHERS

The subject of pastoral leadership touches your concerns, and those of the churches committed to your care, so much so that I am encouraged to be bold in this address, despite my faults in the handling of it, and the consciousness of my great unworthiness to be your teacher.

Before I come to my main task, I will give you an account of why I came to write this book, and why my plain speaking may not be pleasing to some. The Lord has woken up his ministers to see how they might enter into the work of catechising and give private instruction in all the parishes that will not refuse their help. Such pastors have come together to make an agreement, which contained their resolutions for the future performance of their duties. They decided that they should not take up their work without a solemn humbling of their souls before the Lord, for they have long neglected this great and needed duty. Therefore, we agreed to meet together on December 4, 1655, and there join in humiliation, and in earnest prayer to God, for his forgiveness of our neglects, desiring God's special help in the work we have undertaken. We really desire to be successful in the lives of those we decided to instruct. At that time particularly, and on later occasions, I was urged to preach on this subject. Falling in with these wishes, I prepared the following material, which, though it proved longer than could be delivered in one or two sermons, I did intend to preach whatever was most needful for the occasion, and to keep the rest for later. But before the meeting, I fell sick, and my pain and weakness prevented me from attending. At the request of several brothers, I decided to publish the things that I had prepared, so that they might be read rather than heard. I resolved to publish this book for the following reasons:

1. We agreed on a solemn humiliation, and this I prepared for. How can we be humbled without a plain confession of our sin?
2. It was mainly our own sins that we confessed; and who can be offended with us for confessing our sins and taking the blame and shame to ourselves, which our consciences told us to do?
3. When sin is open to the sight of the world, it is foolish to attempt to hide it; all such attempts would only aggravate and increase our shame.
5. A free confession is a condition of a full remission; and when the sin is public, confession should also be in public. Unpardoned sin will never let us rest or prosper, even though we are very careful to cover it up. Our sin will surely find us out, though we can never uncover the depths of our sin. The work of confession is designed to expose our sin, and make us willing to accept its shame - **'He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.'** (Proverbs 28:13) If we are easy on ourselves, and are slow to confess our sins, God come down harder on us, and spell out our confession for us. He will either compel our consciences to confess, or his judgements will display our iniquities to the world.

6. Too many that take up the work of the ministry remain obstinate in their self-seeking, negligence, pride, and other similar sins. It is therefore our duty to admonish them. If we foresaw that they would reform without reproof, we would gladly hold back from exposing their faults. However, the reproofs proved ineffective because they became more offended at them than the sins, and had rather that we should cease reproofing than that they should cease sinning. Therefore, I think it is time to sharpen the remedy. For what else can we do? To give up our brothers as incurable is needlessly cruel as long as there are further means at hand. We must not hate them, but rebuke them plainly, and not allow them to sin further. To bear with the vices of the ministry is to promote the ruin of the Church, for what speedier way is there for the depraving and undoing of the people than the depravity of their guides? And how can we more effectively forward a reformation than by endeavouring to reform the leaders of the Church?

For my part, I treat fellow pastors as I would wish to be treated by them. It is for the safety of the Church, and in tender love for the brothers, that I speak in this way; not to make them contemptible and odious, but to heal the evils that would make them so. May no enemy find this a matter of reproach among us! But, especially, because our faithful endeavours are so greatly needed for the welfare of the Church and the saving of men's souls. How can we afford to love neither and remain silent? Supposing there were thousands in a leaking ship, and those that pump out the water and look for leaks are amusing themselves or falling asleep, and thus by their negligence prove a hazard to all these lives. Would you not awaken them to their duty, and call on them to labour for all on board? And if you speak with some sharpness and urgency to the lazy and slack, thus undermining their reputation, would you not accept a reproof from others? Would you not say, 'The work must be done, or we are all dead men. Is not the ship ready to sink, and you speak of your reputation? Or had you rather risk the lives of yourself and us, rather than hear about your slackness?' This is our case exactly, my brothers. The work of God must be done! Souls are perishing while you set your mind on worldly business or worldly pleasure, and take your ease, or quarrel with your brothers! Nor must we remain silent while men are hastening to perdition by your behaviour, and the Church is brought into greater danger and confusion. Do you not think I care whether I seem to be impolite to you, or displease your impatient souls? If you were as impatient with your sins as with our reproofs, you would hear no more from me, for we would all be agreed! But, neither God nor good men will let you alone in such sins. If you had followed another calling, and sinned only against yourselves, and perished alone, we would not have felt it necessary to attack you, as we have done. However, you have entered into the office of the ministry, which is for the good of us all. If we left you alone in your sin, we would give up the Church to loss and danger; so do not blame us if we talk to you more openly than you would like.

If your own body was sick, and you neglected to seek a remedy, or if your own house was on fire, and you continued singing or gossiping in the streets, I could possibly bear it, and leave you alone (yet in charity, this would not be easy to do). But, if you undertake to be the physician of a hospital, or to a whole town that is infected with the plague, and you refuse to treat the infection that rages through the town, people would never forgive you, no matter how much you resent their criticism. Take it in any way you want, but you must be told of it. And if that is not sufficient, you must be told yet more plainly. And, if that is not sufficient, you will be rejected as well as denounced, you may be sure. I direct all this only to the guilty.

Here, then, are my reasons for publishing in my book in plain English so much of the sins of the ministry. And, I think, the more penitent and humble my readers are, and the more they desire a true reformation of the Church, the more easily and fully they will approve

such free confessions and denouncements. But I find that it is impossible to avoid offending those who are both guilty and impenitent; for there is no way of avoiding this except by remaining silent, and silent we cannot remain because of God's commands. Patient of criticism they can never be because of their guilt and impenitence. But plain speakers will always be appreciated in the end; and the time will soon come when you will confess that they were your best friends. But my main work is now done. I must now be bold, my brothers, and become your teacher concerning some of the necessary duties I will speak about in the following pages. If any of you charge me with arrogance or overstepping myself in this attempt in accusing you of negligence, or that I have over-reached myself in admonishing you, I ask you to put a good construction on my boldness. I assure you that I am not acting according to the counsel of my flesh, which would displease me as much as some of you. I would prefer the ease and quiet of silence if it fulfilled my duty and did the churches some good. But it is for the good of the souls of men and their salvation, and for the prosperity of the Church, that forces me to this 'arrogance' and 'overstepping of myself', if that is what some call it. Whoever that possesses a tongue can remain silent when it is for the honour of God, the welfare of his Church, and the everlasting happiness of so many souls?

The first and main point I put before you is this: It is not the unquestionable duty of ministers to take up the work of catechising and instructing individually all that are committed to their care. I do not need to prove this here, for this is the purpose of my book. Do you think that holy wisdom, or zeal for God, or delight in God's service, or love for the souls of men, contradicts it?

1. People must be taught the great doctrines of the faith, and matters of the greatest necessity for salvation. This is beyond doubt.
2. People must be taught these things in the most edifying and instructive way. I am sure we are agreed on this.
3. Personal discussion and examination and instruction contain many great advantages for their good. This too is beyond dispute.
4. Personal instruction is recommended to us by Scripture, and has been the practice of all servants of Christ, and has been approved by the godly of all ages. As far as I can tell, this is beyond contradiction.
5. We should perform this great duty to all the people, or as many as we can, for our love and care of their souls compels us. If there are five hundred or a thousand ignorant people in your parish or congregation, it would be a poor discharge of your duty if you spoke only to a few of them, and left the rest alone in their ignorance, when you could be of help to them. This is beyond doubt.
6. This great work should take up a considerable amount of our time. This point is just as certain.
7. Lastly, all our duties should be done in order as far as possible, and should be done at the right time. And if we are agreed in the practice of these commonly acknowledged truths, we will not fall out about special circumstances. Everyone is agreed about this.

On behalf of Christ, and for the sake of his Church, and for the immortal souls of men, I beg all faithful ministers of Christ that they will presently and effectively take up this work. Let us be united in it, that it may more easily gain the approval of your people. I confess that I find by experience that this is indeed the work that, through the grace of God, will

bring about a reformation. It will drive away our common prevailing ignorance, will bow the stubborn hearts of sinners, will answer their vain objections and take away their prejudices, will reconcile their hearts to faithful ministers, and will help in the success of their public preaching. It will make true godliness more common than it has ever been up till now. I find that we never took seriously the best way of demolishing the kingdom of darkness till now. I wonder at myself, how I neglected for so long such a clear and excellent duty. But as it is with me, so I believe it is with others. I was long convinced of it, but my hesitation over the difficulties were too great, and my understanding of the duty too small. And so I was long hindered from doing it. I imagined that the people would scorn it, and only a few, who saw the need, would submit to it. I thought my strength would never last, bearing so many burdens before me. Thus I long delayed, which I trust the Lord of mercy will forgive. As it turned out, I found the difficulties almost nothing (except that of my extraordinary bodily weakness) compared with what I imagined. I found the benefits and comforts of the work to be so great that that I would not have missed it for all the riches in the world.

We spend every Monday and Tuesday from morning till night doing this work. If we take in about fifteen or sixteen families a week, that adds up to about eight hundred families in the parish a year; and I cannot say that one family has ever refused to come, except a few individuals who excused themselves and moved away. And I find more outward signs of success in those who come than all I saw in my public preaching to them. If you say, 'It is not so in most places', I reply, 'I hope that the blame for this may not be due to our bad example.' If, however, some refuse your help, this does not excuse you from not offering it to those that will accept it.

If you would like to know how I do it, when I intend to go through the Catechisms, I make a list of every likely person in the parish. I then tell the clerk to go one week beforehand to each family to tell them the day to come, and at what time (one family at eight o'clock, the next at nine, and the next at ten, and so on). If I am forced by numbers to deal with a whole family at once, I only admit the members of that family. Brothers, am I inviting you to take up this work without the authority of God, without the consent of all antiquity, without the consent of the Reformed Divines, or without the conviction of your own consciences? See what the Westminster Assembly says in the Directory about visiting the sick: 'It is the duty of the minister not only to teach the people committed to his charge in public, but privately, and particularly to admonish, exhort, reprove, and comfort them on all seasonable occasions so far as his time, strength, and personal safety will permit. He is to admonish them in a time of health to prepare for death. And for that reason, they should often confer with their minister about the state of their souls.'

Read this introduction again, and heed it. Listen to God if you would have peace with him. Listen to your conscience if you would have peace of conscience. I have made up my mind to speak plainly to you, even if I might upset you. It is unlikely that a heart sincerely devoted to God, after proclamation and exhortation, will not make up its mind to perform so clear and great a duty. I cannot conceive how one who has the least spark of saving grace, who loves God, and delights to do his will (things that are found in all the sanctified), could possibly oppose or refuse such a work as this. The one exception is when a brother falls under the power of such a temptation as Peter did when he denied Christ, or when he tried to dissuade Christ from the course of suffering, and heard a half excommunication – **'Get behind me Satan! You are an offence to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God but the things of men.'** (Matthew 16:23)

Now you have put your hand to the plough; indeed, you are doubly devoted to him both as Christians and as pastors. Dare you, after this, draw back, and refuse his work? You see the need for a work of reformation, so I call on you to promote it. Dare you now neglect the

means by which it will be done? Can you show your faces to your congregations as ministers of the gospel, and pray for a reformation, and the conversion and salvation of your hearers, and for the prosperity of the Church; and then, when you have done all, can you refuse to use the means by which all this is done? I know that the worldly mind is never short of words and reasons for avoiding the truth and duty it abhors. It is easier to argue against duty than to perform it. But consider the end before you pass your final judgement. Do you think it is easy to give a comfortable account of your neglect to God? I dare predict from the knowledge of the nature of God's grace that all godly ministers who have a conscience about this duty will address themselves to it, except those who, by some extraordinary accident, are out of sorts, or who are beset by the temptations I mentioned earlier. It is not without hope that I persuade you to do it, but take it for granted that it will be done. And if any lazy, or jealous, or malicious hypocrites oppose me, or hold back, the rest will not do so. They will take up the opportunity, and not resist the warnings of the Lord. God will expose the hypocrites before long, and make them know, to their sorrow, what it means to trifle with him. Woe to them, for they must account for the blood of souls! The reasons that satisfy them here not to do their duty will not satisfy them then; but they will be shown the effects of their folly, and told that they acted radically from their corrupted wills and worldly interests. Nor will their consciences own those reasons in their dying hour. Then, they will feel to their sorrow that there is no comfort for their departing souls as they review their neglected duties, not like those who have devoted themselves wholly to the service of the Lord. I am sure my arguments for this duty will appear strongest at the last, when they will be viewed at the hour of death or in the Day of Judgement, and, especially, in the light of eternity.

So now, my brothers, in the name of God, and for the sake of your people's souls, I earnestly beg you not to despise this work, but to pursue it vigorously and with all your strength, making it your great and serious business. Much judgement is needed in its management. Consider beforehand, therefore, how to do it, just as you prepare your sermons. I remember how serious I was with some Members of the last Parliament in begging them to appoint catechists in our assemblies. But truly I am not sorry that my appeal had no effect, except in a few of the larger congregations, for I acknowledge that this work, under God, lies in a wise and effective management of it, by searching men's hearts and bringing home the truth to their consciences.

Yet some of our ablest ministers are too weak for this work, never mind the least competent. I fear nothing more than this - ministers, who preach well, but are found imperfectly qualified for this work, especially before old, ignorant, hard-hearted sinners. And, indeed, if pastors are not respected by their people, their work will be despised, their words will be contradicted, and no one will want to learn humbly from them, and submit to them. Seeing, then, that the burden of the work lies upon us, and it is we who must undertake it or it will never get done, let us be up and doing with all our strength. When you speak to your people, do it with the greatest care and seriousness, and be as earnest with them as with all matters concerning life or death. Do the work as carefully as you deliver your public exhortations from the pulpit. I confess again, it is to me the most satisfying work I ever put my hand to except public preaching. And I do not doubt that you will find that it so too if you do it faithfully.

My second request to ministers is that they would at last, with no delay, set themselves to put into practice those parts of Church discipline that are without question necessary and part of their work. It is sad, that good men should be satisfied with neglecting so great a duty for so long. The common cry is, 'Our people are not ready for it; they cannot bear it.' But is it not a fact that you cannot bear the thought of the trouble and opposition you will stir up?

If indeed, you proclaim our churches incapable of conforming to the order and government of Christ, you are conceding to those who have withdrawn from us, and are encouraging them to look elsewhere where that discipline can be found. Preaching and the sacraments can be deferred in some cases till a better time when you can exercise discipline; yet it is difficult to make up lost ground after such a long period of neglect, indeed, sometimes many years, as we have done. If this has come about because of any fault in our Service Book, we must clearly alter our constitution to remedy the situation. I will speak of these matters in some detail later, which I hope you will take seriously. I now implore you, if you would give a comfortable account to the chief Shepherd, and not be found unfaithful in the house of God, do not through wilfulness or neglect delay it as an unnecessary thing. Do not shrink from it because of the trouble it brings, for that is a sad sign of hypocrisy. The costliest duties are usually the most comfortable; and you may be sure that Christ will carry the cost.

My last request is this: that all faithful ministers of Christ will, without any more delay, unite and associate for the good of each other in the work of the Lord, and the maintenance of unity and peace in his churches. Do not neglect your brotherly meetings for those ends, nor spend them unprofitably, but look to them for their up building, and the effective carrying on of the work.

My brothers, I beg your pardon for the weaknesses of this address. I do so long for the success of your labours, and daily pray to God that he will persuade you to perform those duties I recommend to you here. My prayer is that God will preserve and prosper you in the work, and keep you from all the insidious and subtle ways that the devil uses to oppose and hinder your work.

15 April 1656,
Your unworthy fellow-servant,

RICHARD BAXTER

CONTENTS

Introduction

Dedication by Richard Baxter

Contents

Chapter 1: The Oversight of ourselves

Section 1. The nature of this oversight

Section 2. Motives for this oversight

Chapter 2: The Oversight of the Flock

Section 1. The nature of this oversight

Section 2. The performance of this oversight

Section 3. Motives for the oversight of the flock

Chapter 3: Application

Section 1. The use of humiliation

Section 2. The duty of personally catechising and instructing the flock

Section 3. Acts 20: Paul's speech to the Ephesian Elder at Miletus

Section 4. Directions for personal work

CHAPTER 1

THE OVERSIGHT OF OURSELVES

A DEDICATION

To my dearly beloved brothers, faithful ministers of Christ in Britain and Ireland,

May grace and peace be increased in you through our Lord Jesus Christ!

REVEREND BROTHERS

The subject of this book so profoundly touches your needs, and those of the churches committed to your care, that I am encouraged to be bold in this address despite my faults in the handling of the subject, and the consciousness of my great unworthiness to be your teacher.

Before I come to my main task, let me give you an account of why I came to write this book, and why I speak so plainly, which may be displeasing to some. The Lord has awakened his ministers in the county of Worcestershire, and in some other areas also, to see how they might enter into the work of catechising and giving private instruction in all of the parishes that do not refuse their help. They then assembled together in order to make an agreement, which contained their resolutions for the future performance of their duties. They decided that they should not take up their work without a solemn humbling of their souls before the Lord, for they had long neglected this great and necessary duty of personal work. Therefore, we agreed to meet together at Worcester on December 4, 1655, and there joined in humiliation and in earnest prayer to God for the forgiveness of our neglects, desiring God's special help in the work we have undertaken. We really desired to be successful in the lives of those we decided to instruct. At that time particularly, and on later occasions, I was prevailed upon by some to preach. Falling in with their wishes, I prepared the following material, which, though it proved longer than could be delivered in one or two sermons, I intended to preach whatever was most needful for the occasion, and to keep the rest for later. But before the meeting, I fell sick, and my pain and weakness prevented me from attending. At the request of several brothers, I decided to publish what I had prepared, that my remarks might be read rather than heard. Some might object that I should not have preached so plainly and sharply against the sins of the ministry, as I do in this book, and that I should have written in Latin so that it would not reach the ears of the common people. I must confess that I considered this objection very deeply; but it did not alter my decision to publish for the following reasons:

1. We agreed on a solemn humiliation, and prepared for it. And how can we be humbled without a plain confession of our sin?
2. It was principally our own sins that we confessed; and who can take offence at our own confession of sins, and taking the blame and shame to ourselves, which our consciences told us to do?
3. Having prepared the text in English, I had no extra time to translate it into Latin.
4. When sin is open in the sight of the world, it is foolish to attempt to hide it; all such attempts would only aggravate and increase our shame.
5. A free confession is a condition of full remission; and when the sin is public, the confession should also be in public. If the ministers of England had sinned only in Latin, I

would have prompted them in Latin, or else have said nothing. But if they sin in English, they must hear of it in English. Unforgiven sin will never let us rest or prosper, even though we are very careful to cover it up. Our sin will surely find us out, though we can never find out the depths of our sin. The work of confession is designed to expose our sin and make us voluntarily accept its shame. **'He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.'** (Proverbs 28:13) If we go easy on ourselves, and are slow to confess our sins, God will be harder on us, spelling out our confession for us. He will either compel our consciences to confess, or his judgements will proclaim our iniquities to the world.

6. Too many that undertake the work of the ministry remain obstinate in their self-seeking, negligence, pride, and other similar sins. It is therefore our duty to admonish them. If we could foresee that they would reform without reproof, we would gladly hold back from exposing their faults. However, reproofs remained ineffective because they were more offended at them than their sins, and would rather that we should cease reproving than that they should cease sinning. Therefore, I think it is time to sharpen the remedy, for what else can we do? To give up our brothers as incurable is needlessly cruel as long as there are extra means at hand. We must not hate them, but rebuke them plainly, and not allow them to go on in their sin unchecked. To bear with the vices of the ministry is to promote the ruin of the Church; for what speedier way is there for the depraving and undoing of the people than the depravity of their guides? And how can we more effectively forward a reformation than by endeavouring to reform the leaders of the Church?

On my part, I treat others as I would wish to be treated by them. It is for the safety of the Church, and in tender love for the brothers, that I speak in this way; not to make them appear contemptible and odious, but to heal the evils that make them so. May no enemy find this a matter of reproach among us! But especially, our faithful attempts are so greatly needed for the welfare of the Church, and the saving of men's souls. How can we afford to love neither, or, by our silence, connive at the negligence of others? Supposing there were thousands in a leaking ship, and those who pump out the water and look for leaks should be amusing themselves, or fall asleep, and thus, by their negligence, prove a hazard to all these lives. Would you not awaken them to their duty, and call on them to labour for the sake of all on board? And if you address with some sharpness and urgency the lazy and slack, would you not think that any reasonable soul would speak evil of you, and accuse you of pride, self-conceit, or rudeness when you speak so offensively to your fellow-workmen, or tell you that you have done them wrong by diminishing their reputation? Would you not say, 'The work must be done, or we are all dead men! Is not the ship ready to sink, and you speak of your reputation?

Or perhaps you would take the risk, rather than have your slackness exposed?' This is our case, my brothers. The work of God must be done! Souls are perishing while you mind your worldly business or worldly pleasure, and take your ease, or quarrel with your brothers! Nor can we remain silent while men are hastening to perdition by you, and the Church is brought into great danger and confusion. Do you think I care whether I seem to be impolite to you, or displease your impatient souls? If you were as impatient with your sins as with our reproofs, you would hear no more from me, for we would all be agreed! But, neither God nor good men will let you alone in such sins. If you had followed another calling, and sinned only to yourselves, and perished alone, we would not have felt it necessary to attack you as we have. However, you have entered into the office of the ministry for the good of us all. If we left you alone in your sin, we would give up the Church to loss and danger; so do not blame us if we talk to you more freely than you would like.

If your own body became ill, and you neglected to find a remedy, or if your own house was on fire, and you continued singing or gossiping in the street, I could possibly accept that,

and leave you alone (yet in charity this would not be easy to do); but if you undertake to be the physician of a hospital or a whole town that is infected with an epidemic, and you refuse to treat the infection that is raging through the town, people would never forgive you, no matter how much you resent their criticism. Take it any way you wish, but you would be told of it. And if that is not sufficient, you will be told more plainly. And, if that is not sufficient, you can be sure you will be dismissed as well as denounced. These illustrations are only to the guilty.

Here, then, are my reasons for publishing in plain English in this book, so much about of the sins of the ministry. Yet, I think, the more penitent and humble my readers are, and the more they desire a true reformation of the Church, the more easily and wholeheartedly they will approve such free confessions and denouncements. But I find that it is impossible to avoid offending those who are both guilty and impenitent; for there is no way of avoiding this except by remaining silent, and silent we cannot be because of God's commands. Patient of criticism they can never be because of their guilt and impenitence. But plain speakers will always be appreciated in the end; and the time will soon come when you will confess that they are really your best friends. Thus my main work is now done. I must now be bold, my brothers, and become your teacher concerning some of the necessary duties that I will consider in the following pages. If any of you charge me with arrogance or rudeness in this attempt to accuse you of negligence, or I have over-reached myself in admonishing you, I ask you to see a good reason for my boldness. It is for the good of the souls of men and their salvation, and for the prosperity of the Church, that forces me to take this course. Who possessing a tongue can remain silent when it is for the honour of God, the welfare of his Church, and the everlasting happiness of so many souls?

The first and main point I put before you, is this: It is the unquestionable duty of ministers to take up the work of catechising and instructing individually all that are committed to their care. I do not need to prove this here, for this is the purpose of my book. Do you think that holy wisdom, or zeal for God, or delight in God's service, or love for the souls of men, can contradict this proposition?

1. People must be taught the doctrines of the faith as matters of the greatest necessity for salvation. This is beyond doubt.
2. They must be taught these things in the most edifying and advantageous way. I am sure we are agreed on this.
3. Personal discussion and examination and instruction contain many great advantages. This too is beyond dispute.
4. Personal instruction is recommended to us by Scripture, and has been the practice of all the servants of Christ, and has been approved by the godly of all ages. As far as I can tell, this is beyond contradiction.
5. We should perform this great duty to all the people, or as many as we can, for our love and care of their souls compels us. If there are five hundred or a thousand ignorant people in your parish or congregation, it would be a poor discharge of your duty if you spoke only to a few of them and left the rest alone in their ignorance, when you could be of help to them. This is beyond doubt.
6. This great work should take up a considerable amount of our time. This point is no less certain.

7. Lastly, all our duties should be done in order as far as possible, and should be done at the right time. And if we are agreed in the practice of these commonly acknowledged truths, we will not fall out over special circumstances. Everyone is agreed about this.

On behalf of Christ, and for the sake of his Church, and the immortal souls of men, I beg all faithful ministers of Christ to take up this work urgently and effectively. Let us be united in this, that it may more easily gain the approval of your people. I confess that I find by experience this is indeed the work that, through the grace of God, will bring about a reformation. It will drive away our common prevailing ignorance, will bring low the stubborn hearts of sinners, will answer their vain objections and take away their prejudices, will reconcile their hearts to faithful ministers, and will help in the success of their public preaching. It will make true godliness more common than it has ever been up till now. I find that we never took seriously the best way of demolishing the kingdom of darkness, until now. I am astonished at myself how I came to neglect for so long such a clear and excellent duty. But as it is with me, so I believe it is with others. I was long convinced of it, but my nervousness over the difficulties was too great, and my understanding of the duty too small, and so I was long hindered from the performance of it. I imagined that the people would scoff at it, and only a few who felt the need would submit to it. I thought my strength would never last out, bearing so many burdens before me. Thus I long delayed, which I trust the Lord of mercy will forgive. As it turned out, I found the difficulties almost nothing (except that of my extraordinary bodily weakness) compared with what I imagined. I found the benefits and comforts of the work to be so great that I would not miss it for all the riches in the world.

We spend every Monday and Tuesday from morning till night occupied in this work. If we take in about fifteen or sixteen families a week, that adds up to about eight hundred families in the parish a year; and I cannot say that one family has ever refused to come to me, although a few individuals did excuse themselves, and moved away. And I find more outward signs of success in those who come than ever I saw in all my public preaching to them. If you say, 'It is not so in most places', I reply, 'I hope that the blame for this may not be due to our bad example.' If, however, some refuse your help, which will not excuse you for not offering it to those that will accept it.

If you would like to know how I do it in going through the Catechisms, I make a list of every likely person in the parish. I then tell the clerk to go to each family one week beforehand to tell them the day to come, and at what time (one family at eight o'clock, the next at nine, and the next at ten, and so on). If I am forced by pressure of numbers to deal with a whole family at once, I only admit the members of that family. Brothers, am I inviting you to take up this work, without the authority of God, without the consent of all antiquity, without the consent of the Reformed Divines, or without the conviction of your own consciences? See what the Westminster Assembly says in the Directory about the visitation of the sick:

'It is the duty of the minister not only to teach the people committed to his charge in public, but privately, and particularly to admonish, exhort, reprove, and comfort them upon all seasonable occasions, so far as his time, strength, and personal safety will permit. He is to admonish them in time of health to prepare for death. And for that purpose, they are often to confer with their minister about the estate of their souls.'

Read this again, and consider it. Listen to God if you would have peace with him. Listen to your conscience if you would have peace within. I have made up my mind to deal plainly with you even though I might upset you. It is unlikely that a heart sincerely devoted to God, after proclamation and exhortation, will not make up his mind to perform so clear and great a duty. I cannot conceive how anyone who has one spark of saving grace, and who loves God, and delights to do his will (things that are all found in the sanctified), could

possibly oppose or refuse such a work as this. The one exception is when a brother falls under the power of such a temptation as Peter did when he denied Christ, or when he tried to dissuade Christ from the course of suffering, and heard a half excommunication – **'Get behind me Satan! You are an offence to me, for you are not mindful of the things of God but the things of men.'** (Matthew 16:23)

Now, you have put your hand to the plough; you are doubly devoted to him, both as Christians and as pastors. Dare you, after this, draw back, and refuse his work? You see the need for a work of reformation, so I call upon you to promote it. Dare you now neglect the means by which it can be done? Can you show your faces to your congregations as ministers of the gospel and there pray for a reformation, and for the conversion and salvation of your hearers, and for the prosperity of the Church, and then, when you have done all, refuse to use the means by which all this can be done? I know that the worldly mind is never short of words and reasons for avoiding the truth and duty it detests. It is easier to argue against duty than to perform it. But consider the end before you pass your final judgement. Do you think it will be easy to make a comfortable account of your neglect to God? I dare predict from the knowledge of the nature of God's grace that all the godly ministers in England who have a conscience about this duty, will address themselves to it, except those who, by some extraordinary accident, are out of sorts, or who are under such temptations as I mentioned earlier. It is not without hope that I persuade you to do this, and take it for granted that it will be done. And if any lazy, or jealous, or malicious hypocrites, resist me, or hold me at arm's length, the rest will not do so. They will take the opportunity and not resist the warnings of the Lord. God will expose the hypocrites before long, and make them know, to their sorrow, what it is to trifle with him. Woe to them, for they must account for the blood of souls! The reasons that satisfy them not to do their duty here will not satisfy them later on, but they will be shown the effects of their folly and told that they have acted radically through their corrupted wills and worldly interests. Nor will their consciences own those reasons in their dying hour. Then they will feel to their sorrow that there is no comfort for their departing souls as they review their neglected duties, not like those who have devoted themselves wholly to the service of the Lord. I am sure my arguments for this duty will appear strongest at the last when they will be viewed at the hour of death or on the Day of Judgement and, especially in the light of eternity.

Now, my brothers, I earnestly beseech you, in the name of God, and for the sake of your people's souls, that you will not despise this work, but do it vigorously and with all your might, making it your great and serious business. Much judgement is required for the management of it. Study, therefore, beforehand, how to do it, just like you prepare your sermons. I remember how earnestly I spoke to some Members of the last Parliament and begged them to settle catechists in our assemblies. But truly, I am not sorry that my appeal had no effect, except in a few of the larger congregations, for I perceive that this work, under God, lies in the careful effective management of it, in searching men's hearts, and bringing home the truth to their consciences. Yet some of the ablest ministers are too weak for this work, never mind the least competent. For I fear nothing more than this - ministers who preach well, but are found imperfectly qualified for this work, especially manage it in the face of old, ignorant, hard-hearted sinners. And, indeed, if ministers are not respected by their people, their work will be despised, their words contradicted, and no one will want to humbly learn from them and submit to them. Seeing, then, that the burden of the work lies upon us, and it is we who must take it up or it will not get done, let us be up and doing with all our might. When you speak to your people, do it with the greatest care and seriousness, and be as earnest with them as in matters of life or death. Do the work as carefully as you deliver your public exhortations in the pulpit. I confess again, it is for me the most comfortable work I ever set my hand to, except public preaching. And I do not doubt that you will find it so too, if you do it faithfully.

My second request to the ministers of our nation is that they would at last, without any more delay, set themselves to put into practice those parts of Church discipline that are without question necessary, and part of their work. It is sad, that good men should be satisfied with neglecting so important a duty for so long. The common cry is, 'Our people are not ready for it; they cannot bear it.' But is it not a truth that you cannot bear the thought of the trouble and hatred you will stir up?

If indeed, you proclaim our churches incapable of the order and government of Christ, you are conceding to those that have withdrawn from us, and are encouraging them to look elsewhere where that discipline can be found. Preaching and the sacraments may be deferred in some cases till a better time when you can exercise discipline; yet it is difficult to make up lost ground after a long period of neglect, sometimes many over years, as we have done. If this has come about because of any fault in our Prayer Book, we must clearly alter our constitution that the situation may be remedied. I will speak of these matters in some detail later, which I hope you will take seriously. I now beg you, if you would give a comfortable account to the chief Shepherd, and not be found unfaithful in the house of God, do not wilfully or negligently delay doing it as a needless thing. Do not shrink from it because of the trouble it brings; for that is a sad sign of hypocrisy. The costliest duties are usually the most comfortable; and you may be sure that Christ will carry the cost.

My last request is this: that all faithful ministers of Christ will, without any more delay, unite and associate for the good of each other in the work of the Lord and the maintaining of unity and peace in his churches. Do not neglect your fraternal meetings to those ends, nor yet spend them unprofitably, but employ them for edification and the effective carrying on of the work. Read that excellent letter of Edmund Grindal, Archbishop of Canterbury, to Queen Elizabeth, where he pleads for ministerial meetings and exercises. You will find it in Thomas Fuller's THE CHURCH HISTORY OF BRITAIN.

My brothers, I desire your pardon for the weaknesses of this address. I earnestly long for the success of your labours, and daily beg God that he will persuade you to perform those duties I here recommend to you. My prayer is that he will preserve and prosper you in the work, and keep you from all the serpentine and subtle ways that the devil uses to oppose and hinder you.

15 April 1656,

Your unworthy fellow-servant,

RICHARD BAXTER

Outline

SECTION 1. THE NATURE OF THIS OVERSIGHT

1. The pastor's soul
A preacher must know what he is preaching
The failure of theological education
2. Lively preaching
3. Words and actions
 - (1) Grace and godliness
 - (2) The use of limited money
4. The preacher and his sins
5. The qualifications of a pastor

SECTION 2. MOTIVES FOR THIS OVERSIGHT

1. Eternal issues
2. Pastors are sinners
3. The pastor and the devil
4. The pastor's example
5. Pastors commit great sins
 - (1) They have greater knowledge
 - (2) Hypocrisy
 - (3) Preaching against sin
6. Pastors need God's grace
7. Pastors should be honourable men
8. Pastors are engaged in a great work

Hindrances to pastoral work:

- (1) Working for oneself
- (2) Not believing in what one does
- (3) Which side is one on?
- (4) The way one lives
- (5) What blessings?

SECTION 1. THE NATURE OF THIS OVERSIGHT

Let us consider, first of all, what it means to take care over our personal ministry.

1. The Pastor's soul

Make sure that the work of saving grace is present in your own souls. Take care in your ministry that you do not fall short of the saving grace of God you are offering to others, and not remain strangers to the effective working of the gospel you preach. While you proclaim to the world the necessity of a Saviour, do not neglect him in your own heart, and remain ignorant of his presence and saving benefits. Take care that you do not perish while you are calling on others not to perish. Do not starve yourself while you are preparing food for others. There is a promise to the wise that they will shine like the stars, those **'who turn many to righteousness'** (Daniel 12:3), on condition that they first turn to it themselves.

Simply put, sincerity of faith is the condition of glory, though our many pastoral labours are a condition of the promise of even greater glory. Many have warned others not to come to the place of torment while hastening to it themselves. Many a preacher is now in hell when, a hundred times, he called upon his hearers to take the utmost care and diligence to escape from it. Can any reasonable man imagine that God will save those who offer salvation to others while refusing it themselves, and for telling others those truths they themselves neglect and abuse? Many a tailor goes in rags when he is making expensive clothes for others, and many a cook hardly licks his fingers when he is preparing the richest dishes for others. Believe me my brothers, God never saved anyone for being a preacher, not even if he is a good preacher. He saved him because he was a justified and sanctified man, and was consequently faithful to his Master's work. Therefore, take care of yourself first, that you are what you want your hearers to be, and believe the things that you want them to believe, and know the same Saviour you are offering to them. He who commanded you to love your neighbour as yourself means also that you should love yourself, and not hate and destroy yourself.

A preacher must know what he is preaching

It is a fearful thing to be an unsanctified professed believer, but how much more is it to be an unsanctified preacher? Does it not make you tremble when you open the Bible and there read the sentence of your own condemnation? When you write your sermons, how little do you imagine that you are drawing up an indictment against your own soul! When you argue against sin, are you not aggravating your own? When you proclaim to your hearers the unsearchable riches of Christ and his grace, are you not declaring your own iniquity by rejecting them, and your own unhappiness in being destitute of them! When you are persuading men to turn to Christ, and drawing them out of the world, urging them to live a life of faith and holiness, does not your conscience (if it is awake at all) tell you that you are speaking out of your own confusion? If you mention of hell, you are describing your own inheritance; if you speak of the joys of heaven, you are describing your own misery seeing that you have no right to the inheritance of the saints in light. Whatever you say, it will condemn your own soul. What a miserable life when a man studies and preaches against himself, and spends his days in self-condemnation! Such a preacher, without an experience of the grace of God, is one of the unhappiest creatures in the earth. Yet he is usually not conscious of his unhappiness. He has so many rings that seem like the gold of saving grace, and so many splendid stones that resemble Christian jewels, that he is seldom troubled with thoughts concerning his own spiritual poverty. He thinks that he is **'rich, and becomes wealthy, and has need of nothing'**, when the truth is that he is

'wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.' (Revelation 3:17) He is acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, and goes busily about his holy duties. He does not live in open sin, but serves at God's altar and reproveth other men's faults and preaches holiness both of the heart and the life. So, how can this man choose anything but to be holy?

Oh, what a misery is this, to perish in the midst of plenty! To be famished with the bread of life in his hands, while he offers it to others and urges them to take it! Those ordinances of God that were instituted to be the means of conviction and salvation have become the very means of his delusion! It is like holding up the looking-glass of the gospel to others to show them the surface and depths of their souls, while he either looks at himself from the back where he can see nothing, or turns the mirror from side to side and sees himself distorted! If such a wretched man would take my advice, he should make a stand, call his heart and life to account, and preach for a while to his own soul before he preaches to others. He must consider whether the food in his mouth is going into his stomach and nourishing him.

Whoever names the name of Christ, and does not depart from iniquity, God will not listen to his prayers. If **'I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.'** (Psalm 66:18). At the day of reckoning, it will do him no good to declare, **'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name?'** (Matthew 7:22-23) The first thing he will hear are these fateful words - **'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practise lawlessness.'** It was no comfort to Judas when he had gone to his own place to remember that he was once a preacher with the other apostles (Matthew 10:1-7), or that he sat with Christ and was called his **'friend'**. (Matthew 26:50)

God says to the wicked: **'What right have you to declare my statutes, or take my covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast my words behind you.'** (Psalm 50:16-17) When they read this text, preachers should first sit down and expound and apply it to themselves with tears, and then make a full and free confession of their sins, lamenting their case before the whole congregation, and commending their earnest prayers to God for pardon and renewing grace. They will then preach a Saviour whom they know, and feel what they speak, and commend the riches of the gospel from their own experience. Alas, it is a common danger and calamity in the Church to have unregenerate pastors with no experience of the saving grace of God!

So many men become preachers before they are Christians, and are sanctified by dedication to the altar as priests of God before they are sanctified by a heart-felt dedication as Christ's true disciples. Thus they worship an unknown God, preach an unknown Christ, pray by an unknown Spirit, and recommend a state of holiness and communion with God, and a glory and a happiness that are all unknown to them, and are likely to remain unknown to them forever. A heartless preacher is one who does not have Christ and his grace in his heart – the very things he is preaching about!

The failure of theological teachers

Oh, that all the students in our universities would note this well! What a waste of time to spend their energy in acquiring a little knowledge of the works of God, and mastering some of the names that the many tongues of the nations have imposed on them! Yet they know nothing of God, or exalt him in their hearts, or have any experience with that one saving and renewing work that could make them happy. They live only for **'aimless conduct'** (1Peter 1:18), and spend their lives as if in a dream while busying their minds and tongues with an abundance of names and notions while they remain strangers to God and the life of the saints. If ever God awakens them by his saving grace, they will ponder these matters more seriously than they ever did in their unsanctified studies and disputes.

Their former business will now appear to them as something about nothing while they remained wilful strangers to the prime, independent, necessary Being who is our All-in-all. Nothing can be rightly known if God is not known; nor is any study well done, or to any great purpose, if God is not studied. We know little of the creation until we know how it stands in relation to its Creator.

Single letters and disconnected syllables are nothing better than nonsense. The one who overlooks him who is the **'Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End'** (Revelation 1:8), and is unable to see him who is the All-of-all in all things, understands nothing. All creatures, as such, are like broken syllables; they signify nothing when they are separated from God. Actually, if they were really separated, they would cease to be, and separation would mean annihilation. But, when we separate them in our thoughts, we make nonsense of them. It is one thing to know the creation like Aristotle, but it is another thing to know it as a Christian. None but a Christian can read one line of God's science and understand it fully. It is a high and excellent study, and of greater use than many will admit. Yet Aristotle knew only the smallest part of it!

When man was made perfect, and placed in a perfect world where all things were in perfect order, the whole creation was man's book where he could read the nature and will of his great Creator. Every creature had the name of God legibly engraved on it so that man might run and read. He could not open his eyes and fail to see something of God, but nowhere so fully and vital as in himself. Therefore, it is his duty to study the whole volume of nature, but, first and foremost, to study himself. And, if man had continued on this course, he would have progressed and increased in his knowledge of God and of himself. But when he came to know and love the creation more than the Creator, and became separated from him, he lost the knowledge both of the creation and of the Creator so far as it is worthy to be called knowledge. Instead, he now has an imperfect knowledge, even empty notions and fantastic views of the creature and himself because of that separation. And thus, he who once lived for the Creator, and depended on him, now lives to and for the other creatures.

'Certainly every man at his best state' (the learned as well as the simple) **'is but a vapour. Surely every man walks like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain.'** (Psalm 39:5-6) It has been well observed that God did not lay aside his attribute of Creator by becoming our Redeemer, although the work of redemption stands in some respects as second to that of creation, and the law of the Redeemer as secondary to the law of the Creator. This is true of our duties to God as Creator, for they have not ceased. The duties we owe our Redeemer are secondary to those that are due to our Creator. It is the work of Christ to bring us back to God and restore us to his perfection of holiness and obedience. As he is the way to the Father, so faith in him is the only way to return to our former standing and enjoyment of God. I hope you can see what I am getting at. To see God in his creatures, and to love him, and converse with him was the employment of man in his righteous state. Now this is so far removed from our duties that it needs the work of Christ to bring us by faith back to it.

Therefore, the most holy men are also the greatest students of God's works, and none except those who are holy can rightly study them or know them. **'The works of the Lord are great, sought by all who have pleasure in them.'** (Psalm 11:2) But this is not for their sake but for the One who made them. Your study of the sciences is not worth the trouble if it is not God that you seek after in them. To see and admire, to reverence and adore, to love and delight in, God as shown in all his works, this is the one and only true philosophy. The opposite is mere foolishness, and is called so again and again by God himself. This is the sanctification of our studies when they are dedicated to God, and when he is the end, the object, and the life of them all.

That is why I presume to tell you that it is a great error – indeed it is very dangerous for Christian Colleges (please forgive criticism from one who is so unfit to make it) to study the creation before the Redeemer, and study physics and metaphysics and mathematics before theology. No one who has not mastered the foundations of theology is capable of going beyond a fool in philosophy. Theology lays the groundwork and leads the way in all our studies. If God should be sought after in the creation, then tutors should read God to their students in all the sciences. But theology must be the beginning, the middle, the end, the life, the all, of their studies. Our science and philosophy must give way to theology, and nature must be read as one of God's books purposely written to reveal him. The Holy Bible is the easiest of all books. When you have learned from it God and his will as of first importance, address yourself to the study of his works, and read every creature from the standpoint of a Christian and a theologian. If you do not see all things as having their being in God, you see nothing, whatever you think. You ought to see in your study of creation that God is all, and in all, and that **'... of him and through him and to him are all things, to whom be the glory for ever.'** (Romans 11:36)

You may think, perhaps, that you know something, but you know nothing compared with what may be known. Do not consider your physics and the works of God as preparatory studies fit only for boys. It is a most high and noble part of holiness to search after, admire and love the great Creator in all his works. How much the saints of God employed their time in this high and holy exercise! But the books of Job and the Psalms show us that scientific study is not as near theology as some suppose.

For the good of the Church, and for success in their labours, I strongly urge all godly tutors to read to their student, or cause them to read, the major parts of practical divinity like any other science. Should they not go together from the very first? It is good to listen to sermons; but that is not enough. Tutors should make it their business to acquaint their students with the doctrine of salvation, and labour to get this home to their hearts, that all should be received with due weight in order to touch their hearts as well as their heads. This could be the means of making a happy Church and a happy country. Instead of reading philosophy like theologians, they will read theology like philosophers, and not treat theology as if it were a passing thing of no more moment than a lesson in music or arithmetic, but they will see that it contains the doctrine of everlasting life. This is what nips so much fruit in the bud, and pesters the Church with unsanctified teachers! That is why we have so many worldly men preaching about an invisible happiness, and so many of them declaring the mysteries of the Spirit. And (I wish I did not have to say it) that is why there are so many unfaithful men preaching Christ, and so many atheists denying the living God. When they were taught philosophy before or in place of religion, it is small wonder that their philosophy has become their religion!

Therefore, I address myself to all that have charge of the education of our youth, especially of those who are being prepared for the ministry. You, who are teachers and tutors, begin and end with the things of God. Speak daily to the hearts of your students those things that lie deep in their hearts, or else they will be left undone. Let some piercing words fall frequently from your mouth about God, the state of their souls, and the life to come. Do not say, 'They are too young to understand and accept this teaching.' You little know what impression your words will make on them. Not only the souls of your students, but many souls, will have cause to bless God for your zeal and spiritual care, yes, even for one seasonable word. You have one great advantage above all in doing them good. You get them before they have grown to maturity, and they will listen to you when they will not listen to others. If they are destined for the ministry, you are preparing them for a special service for God, and they should, above all, have knowledge of him whom they serve. Oh, think what a sad thing it would be to their own souls, and what a wrong is done to the

Church of God, if they come from their studies with unconverted and worldly hearts, ready to take on so great and holy and spiritual a work!

Out of a hundred students in our colleges, how many are serious, experienced, godly young men? If you send half of them to do a work they are unfit for, think of the harm they will do to their Church and country! However, if you become the means of their conversion and sanctification, how many souls will bless you, and what great good you will do to the Church! Once their hearts are saved under the doctrines they hear, they will preach them with all their hearts. Their own experience will direct them to the finest of subjects, and set them on fire to reach the conscience of their hearers.

See, then, that you do not work with your students so as to produce only groans and lamentations in the Church, and do not labour for the great tormentor and murderer of men's souls.

2. Lively preaching

Do not be content with being in a state of grace, but be careful also to keep your graces alive with use, and preach to yourselves the sermons you prepare before for others. If you do this for your own sake, it will not be lost labour; for what is good for you will be good for the Church. When you set your mind on holy and heavenly things, your people will participate in its fruits. Your prayers and praises and doctrines will be sweet and heavenly to them. They will feel that you have been with God; for what is on your heart will most likely catch their ear.

I sadly confess that I often have to tell my flock about the weaknesses of my own soul. When I let my heart grow cold, my preaching grows cold; and when it is confused, my preaching becomes confusing. I notice also that when I grow cold in preaching, the best of my hearers grow cold also; and the next prayers that I hear from them, to my shame, often reflect my preaching. We are the nurses of Christ's little ones. If we do not take food ourselves, we will starve them, too soon seen in their spiritual leanness and in the dull discharge of their duties. If we let our love decline, we are not likely to increase theirs. If we lessen our holy care and fear, it will come out in our preaching; and if our heart does not show these things, our behaviour will. If we feed on unwholesome food such as errors or fruitless controversies, our hearers will suffer. However, if we abound in faith and love and zeal, it will overflow to the refreshing of our congregations, and increase the same graces in them.

Oh, my brothers, watch over your own hearts, and keep out lusts and passions and worldly inclinations! Keep up your life of faith and love and zeal. Be often at home in prayer, and stay close to God. If it is not your daily business to study your own hearts, and subdue corruption, and walk with God, and if you do not attend constantly to this work, everything will go wrong, and you will starve your hearers. If you pretend to an affected fervency, you cannot expect a blessing from on high.

Above all, devote your time to secret prayer and meditation. There, you will fetch down the heavenly fire that will kindle your sacrifices. Remember, then, that you cannot decline spiritually, and neglect your duty, just for your own harm; many will be the losers, not just yourselves. For your people's sakes, look into your heart. If a pang of spiritual pride overtakes you, and you fall into a dangerous error, and your teaching draws away disciples after you, what a wound this will prove to the Church over which you have the oversight! And you will become a plague to them instead of a blessing, and they may wish they had never seen your face. Oh, take care over your own judgements and feelings! Vanity and error creep in unobserved, and they seldom arrive without some terrible

reward. Weaknesses and backslidings usually have small beginnings. The prince of darkness frequently impersonates an angel of light (see 2 Corinthians 11:14) to draw the children of light into the darkness again. How easily weakness creeps into our heart and our first love, and reverence and carefulness grow less! Watch, therefore, for the sake of yourselves and others.

Now, beside this general advice on watchfulness, I think a minister should take special care over his heart before he goes in to his congregation. If he is cold, how will he warm the hearts of his hearers? Therefore, go to God for life. Read some rousing, awakening book, or meditate on the weight of the subject about which you are to speak, and on the great needs of your people's souls, that you may go into God's house with the zeal of the Lord. Keep up a life of grace in yourselves, that it may appear in all your sermons from the pulpit, and that everyone who comes cold to the meetings will have some warmth imparted to him before he departs.

3. Words and actions

Take care of yourselves, so that your example will not contradict your doctrine, and put stumbling blocks before the blind, bringing them to ruin. Do not undo with your life what you say with your tongue, which will be the greatest hindrance to the success of your work. It also frustrates our work when other men are all week long contradicting in the hearing of poor people in private what we have been preaching to them from the Word of God in public because we are not at hand to expose their foolishness. But it will hamper your work even more if you contradict yourselves, and your actions give the lie to your words. How can you bear to build up in an hour or two with your mouth, then all week demolish it with your hands! This is the way to make men think that the Word of God is only an idle tale, and make preaching seem like beating the air. The one who means what he says will surely do as he says. One proud, superior word, one needless dispute, one covetous action, can cut the throat of many a sermon, and wither the fruit of all your deeds.

Tell me, brother, in the fear of God, do you want success in your labours, or do you not? Do you long to see something happen in the souls of your hearers? If you do not, what are you preaching for, what are you studying for, and why do you call yourselves pastors of Christ? But if you do, then surely you cannot find it in your heart to spoil your work for nothing. What! Do you long for success in your labours but will not part with a little effort for the poor, nor put up with an injury, nor bear with a foul word, nor stoop to the lowest, nor rein in your passions or superior manner! Not for the winning of souls, nor the attaining of your end in all your labours! You set little value on success if you sell it so cheaply, or do little to attain it. Here lies the great error of some pastors who contradict their preaching with their living, who study hard to preach expertly, and study little or not at all to live expertly. All week long is little enough to study how to speak for two hours, yet one hour seems too much to study how to live all week. They are loath to say a wrong word in their sermons, or be found guilty of any great weakness (and there is nothing wrong in that, for these are holy and weighty matters), but they shrug off feelings and words with wrong actions in their lives.

Oh, what strange things some men preach in their sermons; and how carelessly have I seen them live! They have been so precise in the preparation of their sermons that preaching seems easy to them, and their language is so polite, modelled on great preachers of the past. They choose the polite preachers but reject those who spoke out, or put a rein on men's feelings, or refused to dull the heart with their amazing wit. And yet, when it comes down to reality, their congregation leaves the church unmoved, disregarding what is said or done. What a dishonour to the preacher! Those who preach

exactly must live exactly! What a difference exists between public speeches and personal discourses! They are most impatient of vulgar expressions, improper words, and inexact phrases in their sermon, but tolerate the same things in their life and conversation.

Certainly, my brothers, we serve in a great cause, so we must take care over what we do as well as what we say. If we are servants of Jesus Christ, we must not only be tongue servants but serve him in our deeds, for we must be **'doers of the work, that we may be blessed in our deed.'** (James 1:25) Just as we demand each member of our congregation to be doers of the word, and not hearers only, so we too must be doers and not talkers only, lest we **'deceive ourselves.'** (1 John 1:8) Practical doctrine must be practically preached. We must study as much to live well as to preach well. We must think, and think again, how to live our lives as well as our sermons so that we might lead others to salvation. When you are studying what to say to your people, if you have any concern for their souls, you will often say to yourself, 'How can I reach them?' and, 'What shall I say that is most likely to convince them and convert them and promote their salvation!' Should you not think in addition, 'How shall I live, and what shall I do, and how shall I give all that I have for the saving of men's souls?'

My brothers, if the saving of souls is your goal, you will certainly work for this end out of the pulpit as well as in it! If this is your goal, you will live for it, and concentrate all your efforts in attaining it. You say about the money in your pocket, as well as the word of your mouth, 'In what way can I use it for the greatest good, especially for men's souls?' Oh, if only this were your daily study! How may you use your wealth, your friendships, and all that you have, for God, as well as your tongues? Then you will see fruit for your labour that you have never seen before. If you intend the goal of your ministry to be fulfilled in the pulpit only, it seems to me that you are pastors only while you are there. And, if so, I think you are unworthy to be called pastors at all. Let me, then, beg you, brothers, to do well, as well as to say well. Be **'zealous for good works.'** (Titus 2:14) Do not count the cost when you promote your Master's work.

(1) Grace and godliness

Guard your innocence, and walk without giving offence. Let your lives condemn sin, and thus you will be able to persuade men to obey God. Would you make your people more careful of their souls than you are of yours? If you want them to redeem their time, do not mis-spend yours. If you do not want them to waste their time in church, see that you speak of things that will edify and tend to **'impart grace to the hearers.'** (Ephesians 4:29) Order your own family well if you want your people to do the same. Do not be proud and haughty if you want them to be humble. There are no virtues designed to overcome men's prejudice more than humility and meekness and self-denial. Forgive injuries, and **'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'** (Romans 12:21) Do as our Lord did, **'... who, when he was reviled, did not revile in return.'** (1 Peter 2:23) When sinners are stubborn and hard and contemptuous, flesh and blood prompt us to take up weapons to master them by worldly means. But that is not the way (although they may be necessary for self-preservation or the public good). Overcome them with kindness and patience and gentleness. The former weapons may show that you have more worldly power than they do, but it is the latter only that will tell them that you excel them in spiritual excellence. Do you believe that Christ is more worthy of imitation than great conquerors like Caesar or Alexander, and that it is more glorious to be a Christian than a conqueror (indeed, to be a man rather than a beast, which is, in any case, beyond our powers)? Then react with love not violence. Set meekness and love and patience against force, and do not set force against force.

Remember that you should be the servants of all. '**Associate with the humble.**' (Romans 12:16) Do not act like a stranger to the poor of your flock; they are apt to see it as an act of contempt. Familiarity, used for holy ends, can do great good. Do not speak roughly or disrespectfully to anyone; but be courteous to the lowest, as if he were your equal in Christ. A kind and winning manner is a cheap way to do men good.

(2) The use of limited money

Let me beg you to abound in works of charity and benevolence. Go to the poor and discover what they need, and show your compassion for them, body and soul. Buy them a catechism, and other small books that will do them good, and make them promise to read them carefully and with attention. Stretch your money to the limit, and do all the good you can. Do not dream of being rich; and do not seek great things for yourselves or your family. (See Jeremiah 45:5) What if you impoverish yourself to do a greater good; will this be a loss or a gain? If you believe that God is the safest purse-bearer, and that to work hard in his service provides the highest interest, show your people that you believe in sacrifice. I know that flesh and blood will move heaven and earth rather than lose its prey and is never short of sharp words when any duty is against its interest. But mark what I say (may the Lord speed it home to your hearts), that any man who has anything in the world he holds dear, and cannot spare it for Christ if he demands it, is not a true Christian.

A worldly heart will not believe that Christ calls for anything that it cannot spare, and so is self-deceived. I say further, that the man who will not be persuaded that duty is duty because he cannot spare anything for Christ, is not truly a Christian; for a false heart corrupts the understanding, and that in turn increases the delusions of the heart. On the other hand, do not take it as your undoing when you '**make friends for yourselves of unrighteous mammon**' (Luke 16:9), but it is better to lay up treasure in heaven, though you leave yourself little on earth. You will not lose anything in heaven by becoming poor in earth. They say, 'In pursuing one's way, the lighter one travels the better.'

I know that when the heart is worldly and covetous, mere words will not wring money out of men's pockets. But over those who are true believers, such spiritual considerations will prevail. Oh, what an abundance of good our pastors could do if they lived in contempt of the world, with its riches and glory, and spend all they have in their Master's service, and even starve their flesh that they may have something with which to do good! This would unlock many hearts to receive their teaching than all their preaching; and, without this, a confession of religion will only seem like hypocrisy, and probably is.

'Whoever practises disinterest prays to the Lord; whoever snatches a man from peril offers a rich sacrifice; these are our sacrifices; these are holy to God. Thus, whoever is the more devout among us is the one who is more self-effacing.' (Marcus Minucius Felix)

Though we need not do as the papists who go off into their monasteries and give away their property, yet we should not possess anything that has not been given away to God.

The preachers and his sins

Take care of yourself, lest you live in those sins you preach against in others and become guilty of what you daily condemn. Will you make it your work to magnify God, and, when all is done, dishonour him like the rest? Will you proclaim Christ's governing power, and yet despise it, and rebel against it? Will you preach his laws then wilfully break them? If sin is evil, why do you tolerate it in your life and then try to dissuade men from living in it? If it

is dangerous, how dare you dally with it? If it is not, why do you tell men it is dangerous? If God's threats are true, why do you not fear them? If they are false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them, and put them in so much fear without a cause? Do you **'know the righteous judgement of God, that those who commit such things are worthy of death'**? (Romans 1:32) **'You who teach another, do you teach yourself? You who say, "Do not commit adultery"'** (Romans 2:21-22) ... or get drunk, or covetous, etc. [are you not so yourself?] **'You who make your boast in the law, through breaking the law, do you not dishonour our God.'** (23)

What! Shall the same tongue speak evil that is speaking out against evil? Shall those same lips censure and slander and backbite your neighbour, which, at the same time, are crying down these and similar things in others? Take care of yourself, lest you cry down sin but cannot overcome it. While you seek to bring it down in others, you are bowing to it, and becoming its slaves – **'For by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.'** (2 Peter 2:19) **'To whom you present yourselves as slaves to obey, you are slaves to the one whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness.'** (Romans 6:16) O my brothers! It is easier to preach about sin than to overcome it.

The qualification of a pastor

Lastly, take care of yourselves, that you do not lack the qualifications necessary for your work. He must not be a babe in knowledge who teaches men all those mysterious things they need to know in order to be saved. What qualifications are needed for a man who has such a charge laid upon him? How many difficulties in theology are there to be solved? And most of these are the fundamental principles of the faith! How many obscure texts of Scripture are there to be expounded? How many duties are there to be performed when it is so easy to go astray through lack of proper information? How many sins are there to be avoided which, without understanding and foresight, we cannot fail to fall into? How many sly and subtle temptations must we expose to our people's eyes in order that they might escape them? How many weighty and yet intricate cases of conscience do we daily have to solve?

Is such a work as this accomplished by raw, unqualified men? Oh, what strongholds we need to break down; and how many there are! What subtle and obstinate resistance we expect from every heart we deal with? Prejudice has so upset our way with the people that we can hardly get a patient hearing. We can hardly make a breach in their groundless hopes and worldly peace but they have twenty excuses and reasons for continuing as they do, and twenty enemies to fall back on who appear to be their friends, standing by to aid them. We cannot dispute with them on equal terms. We have children in our congregation to reason with who do not understand us. We have distracted men (in a spiritual sense) to argue with, who cry us down with raging nonsense. We have wilful, unreasonable people to deal with who, when they are silenced, are never more convinced, and who, when they can give us no reason, will tell us of their determination to go on anyway. They are like the man that Salvian had to deal with who, being resolved to devour a poor man's property, and being entreated by him to stop, replied, 'He could not grant his request, for he had made a vow to take it.' So it is with the preacher who, when reasons were given for this most religious evil deed of unbelief, had to depart.

We dispute the case that we should appeal to men's wills and hearts, for they do not have either reason or hearing; but let us concentrate on their understanding. Their argument at best is, 'I will not believe you, or all the preachers in the world, concerning these things. I will never change my mind or my life. I will never leave my sins whatever the consequences, for who would be so rash?' We have not one, but a multitude of raging

passions and contradictory enemies to dispute with whenever we undertake the conversion of a sinner. It is like trying to work with a man in the middle of a riot, or in the company of a crowd of violent critics. Who is sufficient for such a work, and what success can we expect? Yet such is our work; and such work must be done.

O my brothers, what kind of men are we in skill, resolution, and unwearied diligence, when we have all this to do? Did not Paul cry out, **'Who is sufficient for these things?'** (2 Corinthians 2:16) Are we not proud, careless, or lazy – all hindrances to the work? Peter asks this question of every Christian concerning the approaching change - **'What manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conduct and godliness?'** (2 Peter 3:11) I say to all ministers, 'Seeing so many things rest in our hands, what sort of people ought we to be in our holy task, and what resolution is needed to do the work!' This is not a burden to put on the shoulders of a child. We need skills for every part of the work? And how important is every part! To preach a sermon, I think, is not the most difficult part. Yet skill is needed to do even this in making the truth clear, in convincing the hearers, in shining the irresistible light into their consciences and keeping it there. We need to drive the truth home into their minds, and work Christ into their hearts.

We shall meet all objections, and clearly resolve them. We shall drive sinners to desperation, and make them see that there is no hope of escaping the condemnation of God without being converted. To do all this, as regards language and style, must be done within the capabilities of our hearers. This, and a great deal more that should be done in every sermon, requires a great deal of holy skill.

So great a God, whose message we deliver, must be honoured by our delivery of it. It is sad that in our delivery of a message from the God of heaven - a message that is of everlasting concern to the souls of men - we are so weak, so rash, and so off-hand, that the whole business comes to nothing in our hands. God is dishonoured, his work disgraced, and sinners hardened rather than be converted. And all this comes about through our weakness or neglect. How often have our worldly hearers gone home complaining of the obvious and shameful failings of the preacher? How many go to sleep under our preaching because our own hearts and tongues are sleepy, and we do not have the necessary skill and zeal to wake them up? What skills are needed to defend the truth against scoffers, and deal with those who dispute it! And if we fail through weakness, how they exult over us! Yet that is a small matter, for who knows how many weak ones are being brought to destruction, thus bringing trouble on the Church? What skill is needed to deal in private with one poor ignorant soul, and bring about his conversion!

Oh my brothers! Do you fall back and tremble under the weight of your responsibilities? Is a normal measure of holy skill and ability, of wisdom and other qualifications, sufficient for such a task as this? I know that the Church is designed to tolerate the weak; but, woe to us if we tolerate and indulge our own weaknesses! Does not your reason and conscience tell you that if you dare take on a work as high as this, you should spare no pains in being qualified to do it properly?

It is not an idle snatch of studies now and again that will turn us into able and sound theologians. I know that laziness often keeps us from our studies, so how much we need the Spirit to qualify us and help us in our work! God has commanded us to use the means; so we have no right to neglect them. It is not God's way to confirm us in our idleness, nor bring us to a knowledge of the truth through dreams when we are asleep, nor take us up into heaven and show us his counsels, while we do nothing but idle away our time on earth. Oh, how can lazy men dare to **'quench the Spirit'** (1 Thessalonians 5:19), and then pretend that the Spirit is doing it all! What an outrageous, shameful and unnatural business! God requires of us not to be **'slothful in business'**, but to be **'fervent in spirit,**

serving the Lord.' (Romans 12:11) If we want our hearers to act like this, how much more should we be so ourselves?

So then, brothers, lose no time! Study and pray, and confer and practice. For in these five ways your abilities will be increased. Take care of yourselves, lest you become weak through your own negligence, and spoil the work of God through your weaknesses.

SECTION 2

MOTIVES FOR THIS OVERSIGHT

Having shown you what it means to take care of yourselves, I now put before you some motives to awaken you to this duty.

1. Eternal issues

Take care of yourselves, for you have a heaven to win or lose, and souls that will be happy or miserable forever. This should prompt you to begin at home, and take care of yourselves as well as others. Preaching may well succeed in saving others without holiness in your hearts and lives. It is possible, though very unusual. But it is impossible to save yourselves. **‘Many will say to me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name?”’** (Matthew 7:22-23) To these, he will reply, **‘I never knew you; depart from me, you who practise lawlessness!’** O my brothers, how many men have preached Christ and yet perished without a saving interest in him! How many preachers who are now lost in hell have told their people of the torments of hell, and warned them to escape from it! How many have preached of the wrath of God on sinners, and yet they are the very ones who are now enduring it! Oh, what sadder case can there be in the world than a man who made it his trade and calling to proclaim salvation and to help others to heaven, and yet, after all, found himself shut out!

Alas! We have many books in our libraries that tell us the way to heaven, and we have spent many years reading them and looked for the doctrine of eternal life. Yet, after all, we missed it! We have prepared many sermons on salvation, and yet we fell short of it! We have preached many sermons on condemnation, and yet we come under it! And while we were preaching so many sermons about Christ, we were neglecting him. We have preached many sermons on the Holy Spirit, while all the time we were resisting him. Our sermons on faith contrasted with our own lack of faith, and those on repentance and conversion reflected badly on our own lack of repentance and conversion. We have preached many sermons about the heavenly life while we continue to remain worldly and earth-bound.

If we are theologians only in tongue and title, and do not have the Divine image in our souls, and if we have not given ourselves up to the Divine honour and will, no wonder we are separated from the Divine presence, and are denied the fruit of God forever! Believe me, reverend sirs, God is no respecter of persons. He does not save men because of their cloth or calling. A holy calling does not save an unholy man. If you stand at the door of the kingdom of grace to welcome others in, and will not go in yourselves, you will knock at the gates of glory in vain. You will find that your lamps are not filled with the oil of grace.

As well as pastoral gifts and holiness and doctrine, you need to have a share in the glory that you preach. Do I need to remind you that preachers of the gospel will be judged by the gospel? You will stand at the same bar, and be sentenced on the same terms, and dealt with as severely, as anyone else? Do you imagine that you will be saved because you are a clergyman, and be accepted with such commendations as ‘He passed as a pastor’, when you should be hearing, ‘He believed and lived as a Christian.’ Alas, it is impossible! You know it is impossible. Take care, then, of yourselves, for your own sakes, seeing that you have souls to save or lose like the rest.

2. Pastors are sinners

Take care of yourselves, for you have a depraved nature and sinful inclinations just like other men. If innocent Adam had need of a warning, yet lost himself and us when he threw it to the wind, how much more do we have need of it! Sin still dwells in us, even when we preach hard against it. One degree of it prepares the heart for another, and one sin inclines the mind to more of the same. If one thief is allowed in the house, he will open the door to the rest because they have the same disposition and design as he has. A spark is the beginning of a flame and a small disease the beginning of an epidemic. A man who knows he is blind should take care where he puts his feet. Alas! In our hearts, as well as those of our hearers, there is an aversion to God, an estrangement with him, together with many unreasonable and unruly passions. In the best of pastors, there often remain remnants of pride, unbelief, self-seeking, hypocrisy, and all the other dreadful and deadly of sins.

Does this not compel us to take care of ourselves? Are the fires of hell still unextinguished in us since first they were kindled in our hearts? The fact that many traitors still remain in our hearts should warn us to take care in this matter? You would hardly let your little children go out for a walk without calling to them to take care not to fall over. Alas! How weak we are when we appear to be the strongest! How easy it is to stumble over a straw! Such small things bring us down by enticing us to do foolish things, or kindle our passionate desires by perverting our judgement, weakening our resolution, cooling our zeal, and lessening our diligence! Pastors are not only sons of Adam but are sinners against the grace of Christ, just like everybody else. These treacherous hearts of ours will, at one time or other, deceive us, if we do not take great care. Those sins that seem appear dead will revive. Your pride and worldliness, and many a horrible vice, will spring up again when you think that you have plucked them up by the roots. It is necessary, therefore, that those with so many weaknesses should take a close look at themselves and be careful in the oversight of their own souls.

3. The pastor and the devil

Take care of yourselves because the devil will come to you with his temptations more than to others. If you wish to lead in the fight against the prince of darkness, he will attack you as far as God permits. He bears the greatest malice against anyone who is determined to do him mischief. He hates Christ more than any of us because he is the General of the Lord's Army and Captain of our salvation. He hates his kingdom more than anything else and also the leaders under Christ's command. He knows what a great victory he will have in the eyes of the soldiers if the leaders fall before their very eyes. He has long tried this method of combat, not against the troops, but by smiting the shepherds, that he should scatter the flock. And so great has been his success that he will continue his attacks as far as he is able. Watch out, my brothers, for the enemy has his eye on you! You will experience his most subtle lies, his unceasing molestation, and his violent assaults.

As wise and learned as you are, take care lest he outwit you. The devil is a greater scholar than you, and a nimbler opponent. He can transform himself into an angel of light to deceive you. He will come to you and trip you up before you know it. He will play the juggler with your beliefs, and cheat you out of your faith and innocence, making sure that you remain unaware that you have lost them. Indeed, he will make you think that they have been increased, when, in fact, they have been lost. You will not see his hook or line, much less the subtle angler himself, as he throws out his bait. This bait will be so suited to your temperament and disposition that he will surely get the better of you, and make your own principles and inclinations betray you. And whenever he ruins you, he will make you the instrument of ruin to others.

Oh, what a victory he gains if he can make a minister lazy and unfaithful, or if he can tempt him into covetousness or scandal! He will glory against the Church, and say, 'These are your holy preachers! See what their lives are like, and observe where their preaching leads them!' He will taunt Jesus Christ himself, and say, 'These are you champions! I can make your best servants fail you. I can make the stewards of your house unfaithful.' If he could insult God by telling him he could make his servant Job curse him to his face, what will he do with you? And, at last, he will taunt God by suggesting that he has made you false to your great trust, and a traitor to your holy profession, and has actually made you serve him, the enemy! Oh, do not give in to Satan! Do not treat him lightly! Do not allow him to use you as the Philistines did Samson by first depriving you of your strength, and then by putting out your eyes, and finally by making you an object of his triumph and derision.

4. The pastor's example

Take care of yourselves because there are many eyes on you, and there will be many witnesses to observe your downfall. When you sin, the world will publish it everywhere. Eclipses of the sun or moon are seldom unobserved. As you take yourselves to be the lights of the Church, you may expect many eyes to be upon you. Other men can sin without observation, but you certainly cannot. And you should thank God for this great mercy, that you have so many eyes watching over you, and so many standing by to tell you your faults. Therefore, you have more helpers than others, at least in restraining you from sin. Though they may do it with malice, yet you have the advantage. God forbid that we should be so stupid as to do evil in public and sin wilfully while the world is gazing on! **'Those who sleep, sleep at night; and those who are drunk are drunk at night.'** Consider what you are doing in the light of day, for even the illumination of your own doctrine will expose your evil doings. You are lights set on a hill, so you cannot remain hidden. (See Matthew 5:14-16)

Take care, therefore, of yourselves, and do your work as those who remember that the world is looking on. Look out for the quick-sighted eye of malice, ready to make the worst of it, pointing out the smallest fault, and making the most of it when it is exposed. How we need to be cautious when we walk before so many evil-minded observers!

5. Pastors commit great sins

Take care of yourselves, for your sins are worse than the sins of others. It was a saying of King Alphonsus, that 'a great man cannot commit a small sin.' Much more can we say that a learned man, or a teacher of others, cannot commit a small sin; or, at least, that the sin is greater in him than in others.

(1) You are more likely to sin against knowledge because you have more of it than you find in others. You are also sinning against the light of knowledge. What! Do you not know that covetousness and pride are sins? Do you not know what a great crime it is to be unfaithful to your trust, and, by negligence or self-seeking, betray men's souls? How true are our Lord's words – **'And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many blows.'** (Luke 12:47) As knowledge increases so too does wilfulness.

(2) Your sins have more hypocrisy in them than others because you have often spoken out against them. Oh, what a dreadful thing it is in us to study how to disgrace sin to the utmost, and make it as hateful in the eyes of our people as we can, and, when all is done,

to live in it, and secretly cherish what we publicly denounce! What vile hypocrisy it is to make it our daily work to cry sin down, and then fall into it; to condemn it in public, but privately to make it our bed-fellow and companion; to bind heavy burdens on others, and not relieve them ourselves because of our bad example! What will you say about this in the judgement? Did you really mean what you said about sin in your sermons, or did you not? If you did not, you are a hypocrite? If you did, then why do you not do as you say? Oh, do not wear the badge of a hypocritical Pharisee, for they did not do as they said! Many a minister of the gospel will be confounded, and will not be able to look up, because of this heavy charge of hypocrisy.

(3) Your sins are worse than other men's sins because you have taken up the responsibility of speaking against them. Besides all your duties as Christians, you have many more as a minister. How often have you proclaimed the evils and dangers of sin, and warned sinner against them? Very well, how often have you spoken on the terrors of the Lord? All this surely implies that you have renounced sin in your own life. Every sermon you preach against it, every exhortation, every confession you make to your congregation puts an obligation on you to forsake it. Every time that you baptise, and every administration of the Lord's Supper, means that you have renounced the world and the flesh, and have announced your engagement to Christ. How often, and how openly, have you borne witness to the fearful and damnable nature of sin? And yet you entertain it, despite all the professions you have made? Oh, what treachery is this, to make such a stir against sin in the pulpit and then entertain it in your heart, and put it in the place of, and even prefer it before, the wellbeing of the saints!

6. Pastors need God's grace

Take care of yourselves, because such great works as ours require more grace than in others. Weaker gifts and graces may carry a man through the normal course of life when he is not subject to severe trials. Smaller strength may serve for lighter works and responsibilities. But, you have entered into this great undertaking of the ministry by leading the troops of Christ against Satan and his followers, and by setting yourselves against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12), and by undertaking to rescue captive sinners out of the devil's paws.

Do not think that an unfaithful, careless attitude will accomplish such a great work as this. You must expect greater shame and deeper wounds of conscience than if you had lived a normal life, if you take up this momentous ministry with a careless soul. It is not only the work that calls for caution, but the workman also, that he may be fit for such a weighty business. I have seen many men who lived good lives as private Christians, and were held in good repute for their piety. But when they took up their duties either of the magistracy or the military, they discovered that the work was above their gifts, and temptations overtaxed their strength, so they ended up as scandalous and disgraced men. And we have seen some Christians of good esteem, who, having thought too highly of themselves, thrust themselves into the pastoral office, and shown that they are weak and empty men. They are a great burden on the Church, and are difficult to get rid of. They could have done God better service in the normal course of life, than they ever did in the ministry. If, then, you venture into the midst of enemies, and bear the burden and heat of the day, take care of yourselves.

7. Pastors should be honourable men

Take care of yourselves, for the honour of your Lord and Master and of his holy truth and ways rests on you more than on others. As you render him greater service, you may also do him more disservice than other people do. The nearer men stand to God, the greater

dishonour they bring on his name by their sins. The heavy judgement executed on Eli and his house was because his sons disgraced the sacrifices and offerings - **'Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.'** (1 Samuel 2:17) It was also the great shame of giving occasion **'to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme'** (2 Samuel 12:4) that provoked God to deal more sharply with David than he would have done otherwise.

If you are true Christians, the glory of God will be dearer to you than your lives. Take care, then, what you do against it, as you take care what you do with your lives. Does it not wound you to the heart to hear the name and truth of God reproached because of your behaviour, to see men point the finger at you, and say, 'There goes a covetous pastor, a secret tippler, a scandalous man. He is quick to preach against these things, yet he lives just like the rest of us. He condemns us in his sermons, but he condemns himself by his life. Whatever he pretends, he is as bad as us.' O my brothers, can your hearts endure to hear men cast the dung of your iniquities into the face of our holy God, and into the face of the gospel, and into the face of all who desire to fear the Lord? Does it not break your heart to think that all the godly Christians around you are suffering reproach for your sins?

Why, if one of the leaders of the flock should fall into a scandalous sin just once, there is hardly a man or woman seeking salvation who will not have that sin cast in his teeth by the ungodly. The ungodly husband will tell his wife, and the ungodly parents will tell their children, and ungodly neighbours and fellow-servants will be telling one another about it, saying, 'These are your godly preachers!' Such words as these from our Lord all the godly in the country should hear - **'For offences must come, but woe to that man by whom the offence comes!'** (Matthew 18:17)

Oh, take care, brothers, over every word you speak and over every step that you take, for you are carrying the ark of the Lord. You are entrusted with his honour! You need to **'know his will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourselves are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes.'** (Romans 2:17-18) Now, I say this, that if you live contrary to what you teach **'by breaking the law'**, you will **'dishonour God, and the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'** (Romans 2:23-24) And you are not ignorant of that standing decree of heaven - **'Those who honour me I will honour, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed.'** (1 Samuel 2:30) Never did a man dishonour God but it brought the greatest dishonour on himself. God has ways enough to wipe away any stain that is cast on him; but you will not find it so easy to remove the shame and sorrow from your own life.

Pastors are engaged in a great work

Lastly, take care of yourselves, for the success of all your labours depends on this. God fits men for great works before he employs them as his instruments in accomplishing them. Now, if the work of the Lord is not soundly done in your own hearts, how can you expect him to bless your labours in bringing it about in others? He may do it, if it pleases him, but you have reasonable cause to doubt whether he will.

Hindrances to pastoral work

I will now mention some reasons why he who would be a means of saving others must look to himself, for God seldom prospers the labours of unsanctified men.

(1) Can it be expected that God will bless a man's labours when he does not work for God but for himself? Now, this is so with every unsanctified man. None but converted men can make God their chief end, and do all heartily for his honour. Others make the ministry a

trade to live by. They choose it, rather than another calling, because their parents dedicated them to it, or because it gives a fair income. Some go into the ministry because it is a life where they will have more opportunity to furnish their intellects with all kind of knowledge. Others choose it because it is not so stressful on the body. Others, because it is accompanied with some respect from men, and because they think it is a fine thing to be leaders and teachers and have others **'receive the law at his mouth.'** (Malachi 2:7) For such ends as these, they have become pastors, and for these ends they preach. And were it not for these, or similar objectives, they would soon give it up. Can it be expected that God should bless the labours of such men as these? It is not for him that they preach, but for themselves and for their own reputation or gain. It is not for God's honour, but for their own, that they seek and serve. It is no wonder that he leaves them to their own devices to earn their own success. Their labours, then, have no greater blessing than they themselves can provide, and the Word will achieve no more than their own strength allows.

(2) Do you think that he will be as successful as others, when he does not do his work heartily and faithfully, and when he does not believe what he preaches, and when he does not do the work seriously? Do you think that any unsanctified man can throw himself heartily and seriously into the ministerial work? Yes, he may have a kind of seriousness that comes from a general opinion that the Word is true, or work with a natural fervour for selfish ends. But the seriousness and faithfulness of a sound believer, who has God's glory in mind, and the salvation of men, this he does not possess. O reverend sirs, all your preaching and persuading of others is but a dream and vile hypocrisy till a spiritual work had been done in your own hearts! How can you do, day and night, a work that your worldly heart finds distasteful? How can you call out with serious fervour to poor sinners to repent and return to God when you have never repented or returned yourselves? How can you preach to poor sinners to look out for sin and live a holy life when you yourselves have never felt the evil of sin or the worth of holiness?

These things can never be preached till they are felt, nor felt till they are possessed; and the one who does not feel them in his heart is not likely to speak with feeling to others, nor help others to feel them. How can you preach to sinners with compassion in your heart and tears in your eyes, and beg them, in the name of the Lord, to put an end to their sins, and return and live, when you have never had much compassion in your own soul for yourselves?

What! Do you love other men better than yourselves? Can you really pity them when you have no pity for yourselves? Reverend sirs, do you think pastors will be heartily diligent in saving men from hell when they are not heartily persuaded that there is a hell, or bring men to heaven when they do not believe in heaven? As Calvin says on the passage I am using (Acts 20) – 'For never will the man take diligent care for the salvation of others who neglects his own salvation.' A pastor who does not have an unshakeable belief in the Word of God and of the life to come will never keep his heart from the vanities of this world, nor seek for salvation and holiness of life, nor be faithful in seeking the salvation of other men.

Surely, he who dares to condemn himself dares not let others alone on the way to damnation. A pastor like Judas, who sells his Master for silver, will not stick at making merchandise out of his flock. The one who lets go his hope of heaven rather than leave his worldly and fleshly delights, will hardly leave his pleasures for the salvation of others. No one can have pity on others when he is so wilfully cruel to himself. No one can be trusted with other men's souls when he is unfaithful to his own, and will sell his charge to the devil for the brief rewards of sin. I confess that I can never give my consent to anyone

who desires to take charge of other men's souls, and oversee them in matters of their salvation, who does not take care of himself, and is careless over his own soul.

(3) Do you think it likely that he will fight against Satan with all his might when he himself is a servant of Satan? Will he do any great harm to the kingdom of the devil when he is a subject of that kingdom? Can he be true to Christ when is in league with the enemy? Now, this is so with all unsanctified men of whatever rank or profession they belong to. They are the servants of Satan, and the subjects of his kingdom. It is the devil who rules in their hearts, so they are not likely to be true to Christ. What prince will choose the friends and servants of his enemy to lead his armies in war? This is why so many so-called preachers of the gospel are enemies of the work of the gospel. No wonder they deride the holy obedience of the faithful! Oh, how many such traitors have been in the Church of Christ during the centuries, and have done more against Christ under his flag than they could have done in the battlefield! They speak well of Christ, and of godliness in general, yet secretly they do what they can to bring them down, and make men believe that those who seek God with all their hearts are a company of fanatics or hypocrites. And when they cannot for shame speak that way in the pulpit, they do it in private among their friends. Alas! How many wolves there are among the sheep! If there was a traitor among the twelve in Christ's company, no wonder there are many now. It cannot be expected that slaves of Satan, **'... whose god is their belly, who set their mind on things'**, (Philippians 3:19) are any better than **'the enemies of the cross of Christ'**. (Philippians 3:18) The false shepherds live well, and preach well, and maintain outwardly a profession of religion. Yet they are held fast in the devil's snares by worldliness, pride, a secret aversion to godliness, or by an unsound heart that is not rooted in the faith or is unreservedly devoted to Christ. They are as bad as those who get caught in drunkenness, uncleanness, and similar disgraceful sins. Publicans and harlots enter heaven more easily than the Pharisees, because they are more convinced of their sin and misery.

And, though many of these men are excellent preachers, and cry down sin as loudly as the rest, yet it is all pretence, and hot air. The one who cherishes sin in his heart will never really attack it in others. I know that a wicked man may be more willing to see a reformation in others, but never in his own life. It is easier for him to preach against sin to others than to forsake it himself. And so, many a wicked minister or bad parent will be in earnest with his own people or children to mend their ways, but it does not touch his own sins or pleasures, thus bringing in his own reformation. There is none of that zeal, resolution, and diligence that are found in the true pastors of Christ. They do not see sin as the enemy of Christ, and as something that endangers their people's souls.

A treacherous commander who shoots nothing but gunpowder at the enemy can make his own guns sound as loud as the guns that are loaded with bullets. But he does no harm to the enemy! These men speak loudly, and shout with an affected fervency, but they seldom win in the battle against sin and Satan. No one can fight well until he gets very angry with the enemy. Every unrenewed man is far from hating sin, for it is his dearest treasure. Hence, you see, an unsanctified man, who loves the enemy, is very unfit to be a leader in Christ's army, He cannot call on others to renounce the world and the flesh, seeing that he finds great pleasure in them.

(4) It is not likely that people will take much notice of the teaching of such men when they see that they are not living what they preach. They can hardly believe in the sincerity of a man who does not seem to believe himself. If he shouts for you to run for your lives because a bear, or an enemy, is at your backs, but does not run himself, you will be tempted to think that he is joking, and that there is no danger at all. When preachers tell people of their need for holiness, and that without it no one will see the Lord, and yet remain unholy themselves, the people will think that the preacher is just passing an hour

or two to earn his money, and that it amounts to nothing but words. However long you lift up your voice against sin, men will not believe that there is any evil or danger in it when they see the same man who is reproaching them cherishing evil in his bosom, and making it his delight. They will think that as the pastor sees some good in sin, they must have some of it for themselves! As long as men have eyes as well as ears, they will know the meaning of your words, even if you do not speak it. What they see speaks louder than your words.

All this, an unconverted minister does in his sermon. If you live a covetous or careless life, you will be preaching these sins to your people by your actions. If you drink, or gamble, or trifle away your time in empty talk, they will take it as if you were saying to them, 'Neighbours, this is the life you should all live; there is no danger in it.' If you are an ungodly man, you will not teach families the fear of God, nor speak out against sin in the company you keep, nor try to turn the course of their conversation to spiritual things, nor speak to them plainly about their salvation. They will take it that such things are of no importance, and will go on with their lives as before. No; you do worse than this, for you teach them to think evil of others pastors who live better lives than you.

How many a faithful Christian minister is hated and despised because of your bad example? What do the people say about them? 'You are so personal! You tell us many things about sin and duty, and make a stir about these things, while such-and-such a minister, who is a better scholar than you, and a better preacher, laughs and jokes with us, and lets us alone, and never troubles us with such talk. You can never be quiet, and you love to frighten men with your talk of damnation, when sober, learned, peaceable pastors leave us alone, and live among us like others.' Such are the thoughts and talk of people that your negligence has brought on. They will let you preach against their sins, and appeal for godliness in the pulpit, as long as you leave them alone afterwards, and be friendly and merry with them when you have finished.

They see the pulpit as a stage, a place where preachers show off and play their part. There, they are given liberty for an hour or two to say whatever they want; and what they say makes no difference. Their very lives in private give the lie to their public utterances. Their lives undo their teaching. Though you know the meat to be good and healthy, yet a weak stomach will reject it if the cook or the servant that carries it in has filthy hands. Take care, therefore, of yourselves if you ever mean to do good to others.

Lastly, consider whether or not the success of your labours is independent of the help and blessing of the Lord. And where did he make any promise of his help and blessing to ungodly men? Even if he promised his Church a blessing by such unfaithful men, he does not promise any blessing to them. To his faithful, Satan will fall before them as lightning from heaven. But where are there any such promises to ungodly pastors? No indeed; do they not by their hypocrisy and abuse of God provoke him to forsake them, and find all their endeavours to be unfruitful, at least to themselves, though he may bless them to his chosen? I do not deny that God can bless his Church through wicked men; yet this is unusual.

Normally, he works through his true servants. And what I have said of the wicked is also true in measure of the godly when they live in scandal and backslide as a result of their sin.

CHAPTER 2

THE OVERSIGHT OF THE FLOCK

Outline:

SECTION 1. THE NATURE OF THIS OVERSIGHT

1. The need for a pastor
2. Overworking the pastor

Some duties of a pastor:

 - (1) The conversion of souls
 - (2) Dealing with enquirers
3. Building up new converts
 - (1) The young and the weak
 - (2) Those struggling with particular sins
 - (3) Backsliders
 - (4) The 'strong'
4. Caring for families
 - (1) Keeping records
 - (2) Visitation
 - (3) Encouragements to pray together
 - (4) Books of a spiritual nature
 - (5) The lord's Day
5. Visiting the sick
6. Caring for the dying
 - (1) Short visits
 - (2) Suitable truths
 - (3) Sick-bed promises
7. Reproving the sinful
8. Church discipline
 - (1) Private and public reproof
 - (2) Further exhortation
 - (3) Prayers for offenders
 - (4) Restoration
 - (5) Excommunication

SECTION 2. THE PERFORMANCE OF THIS OVERSIGHT

1. Unselfish motives for pastoral work
2. Hard work
3. Pastoral work done wisely
4. Teaching truths
5. Plain and simple teaching
6. The humility of the pastor
7. Severity and mildness
8. Zeal

9. Tender love
10. Patience
11. Reverence
12. Spiritual work
13. Success
14. Dependence on Christ
15. Union and communion of pastors

SECTION 3. MOTIVES FOR THE OVERSIGHT OF THE FLOCK

1. The pastor's relationship with his flock
 - (1) Taking care of the flock
 - (2) Pastoral responsibility
 - (3) The honour in doing the work
 - (4) The privileges of the work
 - (5) Relationship with Christ and the flock
2. The Holy Spirit
3. The Church
4. The price paid for the Church

SECTION 1

THE NATURE OF THIS OVERSIGHT

Having shown you what it means to take care of yourself, I will next consider what it is to take care of all the flock. It was necessary to consider first what we must do for our own souls before we look at what we must do for others.

We cannot succeed in healing the wounds of others if we remain unhealed by reason of self-neglect. This would neither benefit our neighbours or us. What is the point of trying to raise others up when we ourselves fall? Indeed, all our labours will come to nothing if our hearts and lives remain empty, the very ones performing these duties. There are some, though expert in spiritual ministry, who go about it in a headstrong manner, and, while acting intelligently, tread down any good they do. They teach too hastily what can only be made holy by meditation, and whatever they proclaim in public is brought into question by their conduct. Why is it that some pastors walk in places too rocky for the flock to follow? When they lead them to the living waters, they muddy them with the filth of their lives, and so undo their work, and lose any improvement in the sheep. Before we speak of the work itself, we must take note of something that is implied in the title above.

1. The need for a pastor

We believe that every flock should have its own pastor and every pastor his own flock. As every troop or company in a regiment of soldiers has its own captain and his fellow officers, and every soldier knows his own commander and flag, so, in the will of God, every church should have its pastor. All Christ's disciples know their teachers who are over them in the Lord. Though a minister is an officer in the Church universal, yet he is, in a special way, the overseer of a particular church that is committed to his charge. When he is ordained as a pastor without a special charge, he is licensed to do his best for all Christians as he is given the opportunity to exercise his gifts. But when he undertakes a particular charge, he limits the exercise of his gifts to his congregation, and gives for the good of others no more time than he can spare. From this relationship between the pastor and his flock flow all the duties that benefit one other.

2. Overworking the pastor

When we are commanded to take care of all the flock, it is clearly meant that the flock should not make more pastoral demands of us than we are unable to fulfil. God does not call us to do the impossible. He does not tell men to jump to the moon or touch the stars or number the sands of the sea. If the pastoral office consists in the overseeing of all the flock, then surely the number of souls under the care of each pastor should not be greater than he can cope with. Does God require one bishop to oversee a whole county, or so many parishes, or thousands of souls, obviously a task physically beyond him? Should he take sole charge over them while particular pastors and teachers stand back from such an undertaking? Will God require the blood of so many parishes from one man's hand when the task needs the effort of ten, or twenty, or a hundred, or three hundred men? It is easier to move a mountain! Then woe to poor bishops! Is it not, then, very sad when learned, sober men desire to do this as a privilege, and wilfully take on such a burden? Should they not rather tremble at the thought of such an undertaking?

Oh, how happy it would have been for the Church and for the bishops themselves if the measure mentioned here by the apostle was strictly enforced! **‘Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood.’** (Acts 20:28) The diocese should be no greater than the ability of the elders or bishops to oversee and rule over it, and so care for all the flock! May pastors be multiplied as the churches increase, and overseers appointed according to the number of souls, so that the work will not be left unfinished. They should not assume empty titles and undertake impossible tasks! Rather, let us pray that the Lord of the harvest will send out more labourers according to the work, and that they will not undertake all the work themselves. I can hardly commend the wisdom or humility of the labourer, however gifted, who not only undertakes to gather in all the harvest in this county by himself, but competes for the privilege.

It could be said that there are many that teach, but they need leaders to guide them. To this I reply, ‘Blessed be God that it is so!’ But no thanks to some of them who try to do the work on their own! However, I must ask, ‘Is not the government of the Church as much for the good of souls as well as preaching?’ If the answer is no, then what is the use of church governors? If it is yes, why is it that so many are going about ruining their work in the church, as well as themselves, by trying to do too much? If preaching alone is necessary, let us have nothing but preachers. So why all this fuss about government? But if discipline is needed, why abandon it, for it involves the salvation of men? Too often, government lies in the hands of those who are too incompetent to perform it. The general, who takes sole command of his army might as well say, ‘Let it be destroyed for lack of command’. And the schoolmaster, who wants to oversee and govern all the schools in the country might as well say, ‘Let them all be ungoverned.’ And the physician, who undertakes the care of all the sick people in the nation, when he is not able to visit a fraction of them, might as well say, ‘Let them perish.’ Yet it must be acknowledged that, in cases of necessity, where there is no one else at hand, it is not wrong for an individual to undertake the charge of more souls than he is capable of handling. But he will undertake to do what he can for them, and not to do everything that a pastor usually does. This is true of some of us who have larger parishes than we can handle, and are not able to fulfil all that the state requires.

I profess, on my part, that I am amazed at the boldness of those who dare take on the sole government of a county. As for me, I would not for all England be one of the two who do all the pastoral work that God requires in the parish where I live if I did not have this to satisfy my conscience, that, despite the Church’s need, I cannot find any more assistants. Therefore, I must do what I can, rather than leave everything undone because I cannot do everything. But these extreme cases are not the usual condition of the Church; or, at least, it is not desirable that they should be. O happy Church of Christ! Would that her labourers were able and faithful and numerous enough for the care of all souls! Would that the pastors were so many, or the particular churches so small, that we could fulfil the command, **‘Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock’**. (Acts 20:28)

Having taken note of our text, let us now go on to consider the duty that comes with the command – **‘Take heed ... to all the flock’**. It is, as you see, **‘all the flock’**, or, every individual member of our charge. To this end, it is necessary that we should know everyone, for how can we take care of them if we do not know them? We must strive to become acquainted not only with each person, but their state, their personalities, and their lifestyles. We must ask, ‘What are the sins they are most likely to fall into? Which duties are they are most likely to neglect? What temptations are they most likely to fall into?’ For if we do not know their spiritual temperature or weaknesses, we are not likely to be successful physicians.

Being reminded, then, of the needs of the flock, we must make sure that we provide the needed care. One would think that every reasonable man would be happy with this statement, and need no further comment. Is it not the job of every careful *shepherd to look after every individual sheep, and a good teacher every individual student, and a good physician every patient, and a good commander every soldier? Why should the shepherds (or teachers, or physicians, or generals) – who are the guides of the Church of Christ - take care of every individual member under their charge? Christ himself, the great and good Shepherd, who had the whole flock to look after, took care of every individual sheep, just like the shepherd in the parable who left **‘the ninety-nine [sheep] in the wilderness, and [went] after the one which is lost until he finds it’**. (Luke 15:4) The prophets were often sent to individuals. Ezekiel was made a watchman over individuals, and was commanded to say to the wicked, **‘You shall surely die.’** (Ezekiel 3:18; 33:8; 33:14) Paul taught his hearers **‘publicly and from house to house’** (Acts 20:20), and, elsewhere, it is recorded that he **‘preached Jesus Christ, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.’** (Colossians 1:28) Many other passages of Scripture make it clear that it is our duty to take care of every sheep in our flock. Many passages of the ancient Councils also show that this was the practice in the early years of the Church. I will give you just one example from Ignatius: ‘Let assemblies be often gathered. Inquire after all by name. Do not despise servant-men or maidens.’ You see that it was then considered a duty to look after every member of the flock personally, including the lowliest servant-man or maid.

But, someone may object, ‘The congregation that I have is so big that it is impossible for me to know them all, or care for them all individually.’ To this I reply, ‘Do you have to be a pastor, or can you do something else? If your reply is no, you are just making excuses, one sinful excuse after another. How dare you undertake what you know you are unable to perform! Were you forced into ordination? It would seem that you had something else in mind when you accepted the charge, and never intended to be faithful to your vows. But if you feel that it is necessary to continue in the ministry, I ask you this: Can you not get help for so large a charge? Have you done all you can to obtain help from your friends and neighbours in calling another pastor to assist you?’

Do you have enough income to support yourself and another? Supposing that you earn enough to keep you. Is it not worth pinching your flesh and your family in order to undertake a work that you are unable to perform, and consequently neglect the souls of so many in your flock?’ I know that what I say seems hard, but to me it is obvious that if you receive so-much income per year, it is your duty to live on part of it, and give the rest to a competent assistant rather than neglect your flock. If you say, ‘That is difficult, for what will my wife and children live on?’ I answer, ‘Do not many families in your parish live on less? Did not many good pastors in earlier days sacrifice in this way, yet they preached the gospel without being burdened?’ There are some still living, I hear, that once called some of the bishops to enter into a bond to preach for nothing if that left them at liberty to preach the gospel. If you still persist in saying that you cannot live so poorly as some people do, I ask further, ‘Will you allow your parishioners to be damned, rather than you should experience need and poverty?’

What! You call yourselves pastors of the gospel, yet the souls of men are of such low value in your eyes that you had rather they should perish eternally than that you and your family should live poorly? That is not right. Should you not rather beg for your bread than put so great a matter as the salvation of men’s souls at risk? Can you bear the thought of the damnation of just one soul because of your selfishness? Gentlemen, it is a miserable thing when men study and talk of heaven and hell, yet few are saved because you do not go to them in earnest. I am sure you would never let your people go to hell so that you

might live a better life in this world. Remember this the next time you preach to them, for they cannot be saved without knowledge. Does not your conscience tell you, 'It is likely they might get this knowledge if they were to receive careful instruction from me privately, man to man; and if I had another minister to assist me, this could be done. And if I live sparingly, and deny myself, I could afford an assistant. Dare I, then, leave my people in spiritual ignorance and condemnation, rather than leave my family in need?'

Must I turn to my Bible to show you preachers where it is written that a man's soul is worth more than the world, and certainly much more than his annual income. Oh, how much are human souls worth? Is not all that we have God's, to be used to the utmost in his service? Is it not cruel to let souls go to hell for fear that your wife and children should have a hard time, and live at a lower level? According to God's ordinary way of working, we could do much to prevent their misery if we denied our flesh a little, which, after all, belongs to Christ? Everyone must render to God the things that are God's (see Mark 12:17); so let me remind you that this is true of everything we are and everything we have. How are all things sanctified, but in their separation and dedication to God? Are they not all his talents to be used in his service? Must not every Christian ask as of first priority, 'In what way can I most honour God with my possessions?' (See Proverbs 3:9) Do we not preach these things to our people? Are they true for them but not for us? Indeed, is not our income from the church devoted in a special way to the service of God and his Church? And should we not use it in our service to the flock? Let any minister who has an income, after calculating how much he needs to maintain his wife and children, use the rest in God's service, particularly in keeping one or two suitable assistants to help forward the salvation of the flock. This is a good practice, and I hardly need justify it.

I must add further that poverty is not as bad as it is often made out to be. If you have food and clothing, is that not enough? And what more do you need to make you fit for the work of God? It is not being clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day (see Luke 16:19) that is necessary in this life. **'One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses.'** (Luke 12:15) If your clothing is warm, and your food sufficient, you will be as well supported in God's service as if you had the fullest satisfaction of your flesh. A patched coat can be just as warm as a new one, and bread and water are just as nourishing as rich food. He who has these things has no excuse for neglecting men's souls for delicious food.

3. Some duties of a pastor

But, while it is our duty to take care of all the flock, we must pay special attention to those who are in need. This subject is often misunderstood, so I will deal with it in some detail.

(1) The conversion of souls

We must work in a special way for the conversion of souls. The work of conversion is the most important thing we can do. To this end, we must labour with all our might. Alas! The misery of the unconverted is so great that it calls out for our compassion. If a truly converted sinner falls, it will be into a sin that can be forgiven. He will never be at risk of eternal condemnation like others are. This does not mean that God does not detest all sins equally, but he brings the saved to heaven, however wicked they may have once lived. However, the Spirit that is in them will not allow them to live wicked lives or sin as the ungodly do. But with the unconverted, it is very different. They **'are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity'** (Acts 8:23), and have no experience of the pardon of their sins and the hope of glory. We have, therefore, a greater work to do for the unsaved - **'... to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power**

of Satan God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by me.’ (Acts 26:18)

If you see someone sick of a fatal disease and another in pain with toothache, will you not be moved to be more compassionate to the former than the latter? And will you not make haste to help the former, even if he is a stranger, rather than go to a brother or a son? It is sad to see men in a state of condemnation in which, should they die, they will be lost forever. I think that we should not let them alone, either in public or private, and put aside whatever other work we have to do. I confess that I am frequently forced to neglect the education of the godly because of the urgent need of the unconverted. Who is able to speak of controversies, or nice theological points, and even of truths of lesser importance, however worthy they are, when he sees a company of ignorant, worldly, miserable sinners that must be changed or damned? I fancy that I see them entering into their final state! I hear them crying out for help, for urgent help! Their misery speaks the loudest because they have not the heart to ask anything for themselves. Many a time have I listened to those who were caught up with fancy arguments but were addicted to criticising the ministry. I left them alone with no answer. But I could not find it in my heart to turn aside from the unrepentant, not to humour them but to talk to them about a salvation that is freely available to miserable sinners. This takes precedence even over the weaker saints who need to be strengthened in their faith so that they might grow in grace.

As Paul’s spirit was stirred within him when he saw the Athenians given over to idolatry (see Acts 18), so it should be with us when we see so many in imminent danger of being eternally lost. I think that if we really did see them within a step of hell, it would surely unstop our tongues, as it did Croesus’ son when he saw his father in danger. He who lets a sinner go to hell without speaking to him puts less value on his soul than the Redeemer of souls. Therefore, brothers, whoever you neglect, do not let it be the most miserable! Whatever you pass over, do not let it be poor souls that are under the condemnation and curse of the law, and who look every hour for God’s judgement. Perhaps you may prevent it. Oh, call to the unrepentant, and apply yourselves to the great work of converting souls, whatever else you leave undone!

(2) Dealing with enquirers

We should be ready to receive enquirers, who come to us with cases of conscience, especially with the question that the Jews put to Peter – **‘What must we do?’** (Acts 2:32), and the gaoler to Paul and Silas - **‘What must I do to be saved?’** (Acts 16:30) A minister is not just a public preacher, but should be known as a counsellor of souls, like a physician is for the body, and a lawyer for estates. Anyone should be able to bring his doubts and difficulties to the pastor for a solution. Nicodemus came to Christ like the people of old came to the priest. **‘For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.’** (Malachi 2:7) If the people today do not know about the office of the ministry, and what it involves, it is up to us to tell them, and publicly urge them to come to us for counsel with the great concerns of their souls. We should not only be willing to take the trouble, but take it upon ourselves to invite them to come. What great good we might do if they would accept our invitation! And, doubtless, many will come if we do our duty. How few have I heard of who have pressed their people to do this! Oh, it is a sad thing that men’s souls should be so harmed by a neglect of so great a duty, and pastors stay silent when they should be reminding them of it, and telling them to avail themselves it!

If your hearers knew the need and importance of this, you would have them knocking at your door, making known to you their sad complaints, and begging for your advice. I beg you, urge them to take advantage of this duty in future, and see that you do it well when

they come for help. To this end, you must become as well acquainted with personal problems as with the nature of saving grace. Then you will be able to help them by listening to their problems, and answer their questions concerning everlasting life or death. One good word of advice from a pastor to those who need it will be of more use than many sermons. **'A word fitly spoken',** said Solomon, **'is like apples of gold in settings of silver!'** (Proverbs 25:11)

3. Building up new converts

We must work hard to build up those who are really converted. In this respect, our work is complex, for it must meet the needs of various kinds of Christians.

(1) Many of our flock are young and weak, and, although they are of long standing, they may have little power or strength. This, indeed, is the most common condition of the godly. Most of them are content with a low degree of grace, and it is no easy matter to raise them to a higher level. To bring them to a spiritual state of mind is easy, that is, to bring them from error to the truth, but to increase their knowledge and gifts is not so easy, and to increase their graces is the hardest of all. It is very sad when Christians get spiritually low: it exposes them to spiritual dangers, it diminishes their consolation and delight in God, and it takes away the sweetness of wisdom's ways. It also makes them less serviceable to God and man, bringing little honour to their Master, and preventing them from doing great good to others round about.

If I may include myself - we too get small benefits by the small use of the means of grace - we too easily go for the serpent's baits, and become ensnared by his wiles. (See Ephesians 6:11) The seducer catches us out so easily when evil is made to appear as good, truth as falsehood, sin as duty, and so on. We are less able to resist and take a stand in an encounter with the evil one. The easier it is to fall, the harder it is to get up. How soon we become a scandal and a reproach to our profession! We know so little about ourselves, and are apt to be mistaken about our true condition, not noticing our corrupt nature when it takes advantage of us. We bring dishonour on the gospel by our very weaknesses, and become less useful to those around us. In other words, though we live at a low spiritual level, and are less profitable to others, we are nevertheless unwilling and too unready to die.

How, sad, when we see weakness in the converted, that we are not more diligent to cherish and increase their grace! The power of Christians is the honour of the Church. We are on the lookout for those who are quick to be servants to all, and become all things to all men in order to win them for Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 9:22) They are on fire with the love of God. They have a lively and practical faith, treating lightly the profits and honours of the world. They love one another with a pure heart, and find it easy to forgive a wrong. They suffer joyfully for the cause of Christ. They seek to do what is good, and walk harmlessly in the world. They abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22), and season all their actions with a sweet mixture of wisdom, humility, zeal, and heavenly-mindedness. Oh, what a joy it is to see such men in the ministry! What an ornament to the Church they are and how serviceable they are to God and to man! People would be more ready to believe that the gospel is from heaven if they saw such signs of it in the hearts and lives of those who profess it. The world can better read the nature of religion in a man's life than in the Bible. Those who do not obey the Word may be won over by the lives of Christians who are eminent in godliness. It is, therefore, a most important part of our work to labour hard in the polishing and perfecting of the saints, that they may be strengthened in the Lord and fitted for the Master's service.

(2) Another group of converts that needs our special help are those who are struggling with a particular sin that keeps them low in grace, and makes them both a trouble to others and a burden to themselves. Alas! There are too many of them around. Some are addicted to the sin of pride, others to worldly-mindedness, some to sexual desires and others to painful and evil passions. Now, it is our duty to help them all, partly by dissuasion and a clear exposing of the sinfulness of sin, and partly by giving suitable directions to a remedy that will help them conquer completely their corrupt nature.

We are leaders of Christ's army against the powers of hell, and must resist all the works of darkness wherever we see them, even when they are found in the children of light. We must be no less sensitive to the sins of the godly than to the ungodly, nor tolerate them or favour them. It does not matter how much we love our people, we will make it clear that we are opposed to their sins. Yet we must treat tenderly those in whom iniquity has got a head, and where they have even fallen in love with sin. They will be as dismissive and impatient of reproof as the unconverted, and even cover up their faults with piety. But the pastors of Christ must do their duty; but they must not hate their brothers, but bear with them and rebuke them. How dare we allow sin to lie upon their souls! This difficult work must be entered into with great wisdom; but it must be done.

(3) Another group that cries out for special assistance is composed of Christians who have backslidden and are in spiritual decline. They have either fallen into some scandalous sin, or else fallen back in their zeal and diligence, and reveal they have lost their first love. (Revelation 2:4) The case of backsliders is very sad, so our zeal must be increased in their recovery. It is sad to see them lose so much of their liveliness and peace and service to God. Instead, they have become serviceable to Satan and his cause. It is also sad to see that all our labours have come to this, and that, when we took great pains in bringing them on spiritually, and had such high hopes for them, our efforts were frustrated. It is saddest of all to think that God is dishonoured by those whom he loves so much, and for whom he did so much by allowing his Son to be '**wounded in the house of his friends**'. (Zechariah 13:6)

Besides all this, backsliding has a natural tendency toward apostasy, and will indeed come to that if special grace does not intervene. Now, the saddest thing about such Christians is our unwillingness to stir ourselves in their recovery. '**Brothers, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.**' (Galatians 6:1) Ensure that the wound is thoroughly examined and healed, and the joint set straight again, whatever the cost. Look especially to the honour of the gospel, and see that they give proper evidence of true repentance, and make a free and full confession of their sins, that some reparation may be made to the Church and their holy profession because of the injury they have given the faith. Much skill is required in restoring such a soul.

(4) The last group I call your attention to is the 'strong', for they also need our help. We need to preserve the grace they already have, help them to make further progress, and direct them towards ways of improving their strength in the service of Christ and his Church. Encourage them to persevere that they may receive '**the crown of life**'. (Revelation 2:10)

All these dear ones must be the object of our pastoral work; and so, in respect of each of them, we must '**take heed of all the flock.**' (Acts 20:28)

4. Caring for families

We must keep an eye on families, making sure that they are well ordered, and that each member is performing his proper duties. The life of faith, and the welfare and glory of both Church and State, depend largely on family life and duty. If we allow these things to fall into neglect, we will lose everything. What can we do, as we attempt to reform a congregation, when the heads of families forget their own duties? If we want to do good to souls through our ministry, a careless, prayer-less worldly family will likely stifle such a work, but a dutiful family will take up the work where you leave off, and help it on. What great good can be accomplished when you encourage families! I beg of you, if you want to reform your people and forward their welfare, do all that you can to promote faith in families. To this end, let me entreat you to follow these instructions:

(1) Get information to see how each family is doing, so that you will know what to say when you visit them.

(2) Visit them occasionally when they are at leisure, and ask the head of the family whether he prays with them and reads the Scripture. Tell the family that to neglect these things is a sin. If you have opportunity, pray with them before you go, and give them examples of what you would like them do. Perhaps, too, it might be a good idea to obtain a promise from them that they will be more careful over their spiritual duties in future.

(3) If you find anyone through ignorance or lack of practice, unwilling to pray out loud, encourage him to pray for his own needs. This will touch his heart. In the meantime, advise him to use a written prayer rather than not pray at all. Tell him, however, that it is a sin and a shame to be so careless as to be unable to speak to God in prayer when even a beggar can find the words to ask for money. Using a written prayer is a necessity, like a crutch to a cripple. He should not be content with this state of affairs, however, but learn to do better as quickly as possible, seeing that prayer should come from the depths of his heart, and touch on his various needs and circumstances.

(4) See that every family possesses some useful spiritual books besides the Bible. If they have none, persuade them to buy some. If they are unable to buy any, give them some copies if you can. If you are not able to do this, get some better-off person in your congregation, who is ready to do some good, to donate them. And promise to go and start them off by reading to them in the evening during their leisure time, and especially on the Lord's Day.

(5) Tell them how to spend the Lord's Day, and how to stop their worldly business on that day. This will prevent burdens and distractions from hindering their attendance at church, and give them time to spend with their families. The life of faith depends largely on these things because poor people have so little free time. If they lose this, they will lose all, and remain as ignorant as brute beasts. Persuade the head of each family to make his children and servants repeat the Catechism to him every Sabbath evening, and give him an account of what they have heard at church during the day. I beg you, do not neglect this important part of your work. Get heads of families to do their duty, for they will not only save you a great deal of work, but they will further the success of your labours. If a captain can get his officers under him to do their duty, he will control the soldiers with less trouble than when all the responsibility remains on his own shoulders. You are not likely to see any reformation till you get reformation into the family. You may find a little evidence of spirituality here and there; but while it is confined to individuals, and is not promoted in families, it will not prosper, nor bring much future fruit.

5. Visiting the sick

Be diligent in visiting the sick, and in helping them to prepare either for a fruitful life or a peaceful death. Though this should be our day-to-day experience, yet, at such a time, it requires extraordinary care both on our part and theirs. When time has almost run out, and they must now or never be reconciled to God, oh, how concerned they should be to redeem those last hours, and lay hold of eternal life! When we see that we have only a few days or hours to speak to them about their eternal state, who, except a stupid man or an infidel, will not desire to spend some time with them, and do all he can for their salvation? Does it not awaken us to have compassion on an anguished man, and consider that in a few days his soul will be either in heaven or hell? Surely, it tests the faith and seriousness of pastors when they spend time in the company of the dying! They have the opportunity to weigh up, if they are in earnest, things concerning the life to come. So great is the change that is made by death, it should stir us to the depths when we see someone so near it, and excite in us a deep desire to be an inferior angel to the soul before it departs from the body. We long for souls to be ready to go with the convoy of superior angels to the **'inheritance of the saints in light'**. (Colossians 1:12) When a man is almost at his journey's end and his next step could bring him to heaven or hell, while there is hope, it is time for us to help him if we can. As his urgent spiritual state moves us to seize the opportunity, so also the advantage that sickness and the prospect of death bring. Even the hardest of sinners will listen on their deathbeds, though they scorned us before. Their anger will dissipate, and they will be as gentle as lambs, whereas once they were as fierce as lions.

I find that not one in ten of the most obstinate scornful wretches in my parish when close to death will not humble themselves, confess their sins, profess repentance, and promise that if they ever recover they will reform their lives. Cyprian says to those that are healthy, 'The one that reminds himself every day that he is dying, will despise the present, and hasten to things to come. Much more the one who feels himself to be in the very act of dying.' Oh, how resolved the worst of sinners are to cast away their sins, promise reformation, and cry out against the folly and vanity of this world, when they see death drawing near to take them away without delay! Perhaps you say that these conversions are forced and not sincere, and that we have no great hope of it doing them any good so far as their salvation is concerned. I confess that it is very common for sinners to be frightened when confronting death, but not so common to be converted to the Saviour. I know Augustine said, 'He can never die badly if he lives well, and scarcely will he die well if he lives badly.' Yet 'scarcely' and 'never' do not have the same meaning. It should make us all the more diligent in times of health, even when we are 'scarcely' ill, to find the best of remedies, because illness is not 'never'!

6. Caring for the dying

Now, as my task is not to provide a complete directory of things to do for the dying, I will tell you just three things that are worthy of your attention.

(1) Do not stay until their strength and understanding have gone, and time so short that you hardly know what to do. Go as soon as you hear that they are sick, whether they send for you or not.

(2) When the time is so short that there is no opportunity to instruct them in the principles of the faith, be sure to stick to the important points, and dwell on those truths that are best designed to lead to their conversion, showing them the glories of the life to come, and the way in which they were purchased for us, and the great sin and folly of neglecting

salvation in times of health. Tell them also of the possibility that still remains of obtaining salvation if they believe in Christ as their only Saviour, and repent of their sins.

(3) If they recover, be sure to remind them of the promises they made while they were ill. Go to them with the object of touching their consciences; and, whenever you see them turning away, go to them and remind them of what they said when they were on their sickbed. Pastoral visits can help patients in their recovery, and are often the means of converting many a soul. Therefore you must come to those whose illness is not fatal as well as those that are dying, and take the opportunity to bring them to repentance. A bishop of Cologne is said to have answered the Emperor Sigismund with these words, when he asked him the way to be saved - 'He must become what he purposed, or promised to be, when he was last troubled with a kidney stone or the gout!'

7. Reproving the sinful

We must reprove and exhort those that live sinful lives without repentance. Before we bring such matters before the church or its leaders, it is often best for the minister to think how he can privately bring the sinner to repentance, especially if it is not a public offence. Here, much skill is required, and a different treatment is required for each offender according to his circumstances. However, for most, we must speak with the greatest plainness and power to shake their careless hearts, and make them see what it means to dally with sin. Show them the evil of it, and its sad effects with regard to God and themselves.

8. Church discipline

The last part of our oversight that I will comment on is the exercise of church discipline. This consists, after private or a more public reproof, of an exhortation to repent, and a prayer for the offender, with the object of restoring the repentant, and excluding the unrepentant.

(1) In the case of public offences, and even of those of a more private nature, when the offender remains unrepentant, he must be reprov'd before all, and again invited to repent. This is not an easy duty because we do not do it often enough. It was not only Christ's command to tell the church, but Paul's, to '**rebuke in the presence of all**'. (1 Timothy 5:20) The early Church constantly practised discipline until selfishness and formality caused it to fall into disuse. There is no room to doubt whether this is our duty, and there remains little to doubt that we have been unfaithful in performing it. Many of us who would be ashamed to be seen neglecting preaching or praying little consider what we are doing when we wilfully neglect this duty and other parts of discipline. We bring the burden of denouncing swearing and drunkenness and fornication, and other sins, on our heads when we neglect the means by which God has appointed for their cure. If anyone replies, 'There is not much chance that public reproof will do them any good, for they will grow angry under its shame', I answer in this way:

(a) It is wrong for anyone to say that the ordinances of God are useless, or make light of God's service instead of doing it. Can the creature oppose his Creator? God makes his ordinances useful, or he would never have appointed them.

(b) The usefulness of discipline becomes clear in the act of shaming sin and humbling the sinner, and in demonstrating the holiness of Christ and his doctrine and his Church to the world.

(c) What else is left for us to do with such sinners? Would you give them up as hopeless? That would be worse than reproof. Are there other means available? Why, when all other means have been used without success, here is the last remedy.

(d) The main use of public discipline is not for the offender's sake but for the Church. It tends to deter others from similar sins, and so preserves the congregation and their worship in purity. Seneca said, 'He who excuses present evils transmits them to posterity.' And elsewhere he said, 'He who spares the guilty harms the good.'

(2) To reproof, we add exhortation in order to bring an offender to repentance and confession, to the satisfaction of the church. The church must avoid fellowship with scandalous and unrepentant sinners, for, when sinners have shown evidence of their sin, they must also show some evidence of their repentance. There is no way to know their spiritual state without evidence. So what other evidence can the church look for except repentance; and then, an actual reformation of life? Much wisdom, I confess, should be exercised in such proceedings, lest we do more harm than good. But Christian wisdom follows the path of duties, and suits them to their ends, for worldly wisdom actually excludes them. While performing these duties, we should act humbly, even when we deal most sharply. We must make it plain that we are acting not from any ill will, nor from a superior position, nor out of a spirit of revenge for any injury, but a desire only to do the needed duty out of a good conscience.

Therefore, it may be necessary to show the people the commands of God that oblige us to do what we must. Use such words as these:

'Brothers, sin is a hateful evil in the eyes of our most holy God, however lightly unrepentant sinners treat it. God rightly provides the everlasting torments of hell for the punishment of sin, and only the sacrifice of the Son of God will prevent that punishment falling on the sinner when he truly repents and forsakes his sin.'

Thus, God, who calls all to repentance (see 2 Peter 3:9), commands us to '**exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today", lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**' (Hebrews 3:13) He also commands that we should not hate our brother in our heart, but rebuke our neighbour when he falls into sin. (See Leviticus 19:17) If our brother offends us, we should tell him his fault - just between the two of us - and if he still refuses to listen, we should take two or three witnesses with us. Then, if he still refuses to listen, we should tell the church. If he will not listen to the church, we must treat him like a heathen and a publican. (See Matthew 18:17) '**Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.**' (1 Timothy 5:20) We may '**exhort and rebuke with full authority.**' (Titus 2:15) Indeed, even if an apostle of Christ is sinning openly, he should be reproofed openly, as Paul did Peter. (See Galatians 2:11, 14) If they do not repent, we should avoid them, and not even eat with them. (See 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11-12, 14; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13)

Having heard of the scandalous conduct of A. B., of such-and-such a church or parish, and having received sufficient proof that he has committed a despicable sin, we then set out to deal with him in a serious manner in order to bring him to repentance. However, to the great grief of our hearts, we may see no satisfactory results for our efforts. He still seems to remain unrepentant, for, although he professed repentance, he continues to live in the same sin. We therefore judge it our duty to go on to a further remedy that Christ commanded us to use. We beg him, in the name of the Lord, and with no further delay, to consider in his heart the greatness of his sin, the wrong he has done to Christ and to himself, and the scandal and grief he is bringing on others. We earnestly beg him, for the

sake of his own soul, to consider what he has gained by his sin and impenitence, and whether it is worth losing everlasting life.

What will it be like for him when he stands before God in the judgement, and appears before the Lord Jesus? When death snatches his soul from his body, will he be found in an unrepentant state? We, as messengers of Jesus Christ, beg him, for the sake of his own soul, as he will soon have to answer before the bar of God, to lay aside his hard and impenitent heart and sincerely bewail and confess his sin before God and his congregation. We will make known this deep desire of our heart, not out of any ill will towards him - for the Lord knows that we love his soul – but in obedience to Christ who has given us the duty of confronting him, and, if possible, take the opportunity of saving him from his sin, from the power of Satan, and from the everlasting wrath of God. We will point out to him that he needs to be reconciled to God and to his church. Therefore, he must humble himself into a state of true remorse before he is humbled by a condemnation for which there is no remedy.

This is how I think a public exhortation should go. In some cases, where the sinner considers his sin to be only slight, it may be necessary to point out the dangers of this attitude by quoting some passages of Scripture that expose the evil and dangers of sin.

(3) Together with these reproofs and exhortations, we must ask the congregation to pray on behalf of the offender. This should be done in every case of discipline, but particularly if the offender refuses to come and receive admonition, or gives no evidence of repentance, or shows no desire for the prayers of the congregation. In an extreme case, we should ask the congregation to pray for him in his absence, pointing out what a fearful condition the unrepentant are in, begging them to take pity on a poor soul that is so blinded and hardened by sin and Satan that he cannot pity himself. ‘Just imagine’, I say, ‘what it is like for a man to appear before the living God in such a condition! Therefore join together in earnest prayer to God, that he will open his eyes and soften and humble his stubborn heart before he goes to hell. Accordingly, let us be very fervent in our prayers for him.’ That should make the congregation feel at one with us. Who knows, but that God will hear our prayers, and the sinner’s heart will relent because of them, more than through all our exhortations?

In my view, it is a fine thing for the congregation to meet together for the next three days to join in earnest prayer to God for the opening of the sinner’s eyes and the softening of his heart that he might be saved from impenitence and eternal death. If pastors would perform this duty wholeheartedly, they might see something come of it, and expect a blessing from it. But when we shrink from all that is risky or difficult in our work, and try to avoid all that is costly or troublesome, we cannot expect any great good to come out of worldly, carnal, partial use of means. Some might be recovered here and there, but the gospel cannot be glorified when we perform our duty so lamely and defectively.

(4) We should restore every repentant sinner to the fellowship of the church. As we must not teach an offender to make light of discipline by making it too easy, so neither must we discourage him by being too severe. If he seems to be really sensitive to the sinfulness of his conduct, and is repentant on its account, we must see that he confesses his guilt, and promises to flee such sins in the future and walk more carefully to avoid temptation. He must not rely on his own strength, but look to the grace that is in the Lord Jesus. We must assure him of the riches of God’s love, and the sufficiency of Christ’s blood, to pardon his sins, if he will but believe and repent. We must ensure that he asks to be restored to the fellowship of the church, and for prayers to God for his pardon and salvation. We must also tell the church to imitate Christ in forgiving and receiving repentant sinners. If he has

been cast out, he should be restored to their fellowship; and they should never reproach him for his sins, or cast them in his teeth, but forgive, even as Christ does.

Finally, we must give God thanks for his recovery, and pray for the confirmation of his faith and his future preservation.

(5) The last part of discipline is the exclusion from the communion of the church of those who, after sufficient counselling, remain unrepentant. Exclusion from church fellowship (commonly called *excommunication*) comes in various degrees and in various ways. The usual practice is to remove an unrepentant sinner from the fellowship only until it pleases the Lord to give him a true spirit of repentance. During this exclusion (or, removal), the minister or leaders of the church are given authority to charge the people, in the name of the Lord, to have no fellowship with him, and to pronounce him one whose presence the church must avoid. It is the people's duty to shun him if he says anything that contradicts the Word of God. Above all, we must pray for the repentance and restoration of those who are excommunicated. And when God gives them repentance, we will gladly receive them back again into the fellowship of the church. Would that you were as faithful in practising this discipline as you are convinced by its truth and usefulness! Do not discount it by your negligence, for I write and plead for it with the highest commendation. It is worthy of our consideration, for we stand before the bar of God in this matter. We pay lip service to discipline, but in practice we either hinder it with our tongues because we do not appreciate its nature and necessity, or we bring it into disrepute by our omission. If hypocrisy, or the failure to do the revealed will of our Master, is not a great sin, then we may be in a better position than others with regard to judging evil. However, in our failure to exercise discipline, we are much worse than those we so loudly condemn. I will not command the obstinate neglecters of discipline to take back their words until they are ready to do it, nor commend those who defend discipline in their writings until they practice it. These 'defenders' of discipline give many testimonies to prove and commend discipline, yet they condemn themselves by not practising it.

It amazes me to hear of some that I used to take for reverend, godly theologians condemn Sacramentarians and Disciplinarians as a sect. When I wanted to know their names, they told me that they are those who will not give the sacrament to everyone in the parish, and make distinctions by exercising discipline. I thought the devil had got a great victory if he had tempted only one godly pastor of a church to neglect discipline. This neglect of discipline is as bad as neglecting preaching. It appears that they condemn themselves by scorning a duty they neglect. I am sure we need to understand how much of our authority and work consists in pastoral guidance. To be against discipline is actually to be against the ministry; and to be against the ministry is to be against the church; and to be against the church is to be against Christ. Do not dismiss the harshness of this comment until you are free from the charge of it before the Lord.

SECTION 2

THE PERFORMANCE OF THIS OVERSIGHT

Having considered the nature of the oversight, I will speak next of its performance; not in great detail, for that would be tedious, but in general.

1. Unselfish motives for pastoral work

Pastoral work must be carried out purely for God and for the salvation of souls, not for any private ends of our own. A wrong motive makes all the work bad as far as we are concerned; but the work in itself is good. Otherwise, we are not serving God but ourselves if we do not do it for the Lord. There are those who take up pastoral work to make it a trade as their worldly livelihood. Well, they will find that they have chosen a bad trade, though a good employment. Self-denial is absolutely necessary for every Christian, but it is doubly necessary for a minister; for, without it, he cannot give God an hour's faithful service. Hard study, the acquiring of great knowledge, and excellent preaching, is only hypocritical sinning unless the motives are right. This saying of Bernard is well known:

'Some desire to know merely for the sake of knowing, and that is shameful curiosity. Some desire to know that they may sell their knowledge; and that too is shameful. Some desire to be known for reputation's sake, and that is shameful vanity. But there are some who desire to know that they may edify others, and that is praiseworthy; and there are some who desire to know that they themselves may be edified, and that is wisdom.'

2. Hard work

Pastoral work should be carried on diligently and painstakingly, for it has great consequences for ourselves and for others. We seek to uphold the world and save it from the curse of God, to perfect the creation, to attain the ends of Christ's death, to save ourselves and others from condemnation, to overcome the devil and demolish his kingdom, to set up the kingdom of Christ, and help others to enter into its glory. Can these ends be achieved with a careless mind or a lazy hand? Oh, see, then, that this work is done with all your might! Study well, for the well is deep and our brains are shallow. Cassiodorus says – 'Here the common level of knowledge is not to be the limit; here a true ambition is demonstrated; the more a deep knowledge is sought after, the greater the honour in attaining it.' But especially, be painstaking in the practice and exercise of your knowledge. Let Paul's words ring continually in your ears, '**For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!**' (1 Corinthians 6:19) Think about yourselves, and what lies heavy in your hands, and say, 'If I do not stir myself, Satan will prevail, and the people will perish forever, and their blood will be required at my hand. By avoiding labour and suffering, I bring upon myself a thousand times more than I avoid; whereas, by being diligent in the work, I am preparing myself for future blessedness.' No one was ever made a loser by God.

3. Pastoral work done wisely

Pastoral work must be carried on wisely and in its proper order. Milk goes before strong meat; the foundation must be laid before we attempt to raise the building. Children must not be treated like adults. Sinners must be brought into a state of grace before we can expect from them the works of grace. The foundation work of conversion, and repentance from dead works, and faith in Christ, must be first and frequently and thoroughly be taught.

We must not go beyond the capacities of our people, nor teach them advanced doctrine, until they have learned the first principles of the faith. Gregory of Nyssa says - 'We do not teach infants the deep precepts of science, but we teach them first the letters, and then the syllables, etc. So the guides of the Church first put before their hearers certain documents that read like elementary tables; and so by degrees we bring before them more advanced and weighty matters.'

That is why the Church took so much care with their catechumens before they baptised them, for they refused to lay down unpolished stones in the building.

4. Teaching truths

Throughout the course of our ministry, we must concentrate on the greatest, most certain, and most necessary truths and be more sparing with the rest. If we teach Christ to our people, we teach them everything. Get them on the way to heaven and they will have knowledge enough. The great and commonly accepted truths of our faith are the ones men live on, and which prove to be the great instruments of destroying man's sins and raising his heart to God. We must, therefore, always have an eye for our people's needs. Remembering that '**one thing is needed**' (Luke 10:42) will wean us off elaborate and needless arguments and unprofitable controversies. So many things can be known; but this must be known, or else our people will be undone forever. NECESSITY is the great disposer of a minister's course of study and labour. If we were sufficient for everything, we might attempt everything, and work our way through the whole Encyclopaedia. But life is too short, and we are slow, and eternal things are pressing, and the souls that depend on our teaching are precious.

I confess that necessity has led me in my studies and lifestyle. It chooses what books I should read, and tells me when and how long I should read them. It chooses my text, and makes my sermon, both as to substance and to delivery, so far as I can keep my moral failures out of it. Though in my case, it was the constant expectation of death that gave me reason for this; yet even the healthiest man should make sure of necessary things first, considering the uncertainty and briefness of his life. Xenophon thought - 'There is no better teacher than necessity, which teaches all things most diligently.' While studying, preaching, or labouring, who can do anything else, because he knows that these things **MUST** be done? Who can trifle or delay when he feels the urgent spur of necessity? As one old soldier said, 'Not lengthy discussion, but speedy and strong contending is needed when necessity urges us on.' How much more we, when our business is more important! Doubtless this is the best way to redeem our time, to see that we do not lose an hour by spending it on unnecessary things. This is the best way to be profitable to others, though not always the best way to be admired and applauded by others. Because of men's frailty, it is true what Seneca says - 'We are attracted to novelties rather than to great things.'

That is why a preacher often goes back over the same things, because matters of 'high theology' do not come up very often. We must not overlook the necessary truths, or fall back on exotic truths, to satisfy those that are looking for novelties, though we could clothe the same truths in a new dress every time we deliver them. The great tomes and tedious controversies that give us so much trouble, and waste so much of our time, are usually no more than opinions rather than about vital truths. As Marcilio Ficino says - 'Necessity is shut up within narrow limits.' This is not true of opinions; and, as Gregory Nazianzen and Seneca often said, 'Necessities are common and obvious; it is superfluous for us to waste our time and labour on them, and then complain when we do not attain them.' Pastors, then, must watch out for their flocks, and know what to feed them, both as to substance and style. Usually, the substance is chosen first, being more important than the style. If you are to choose what authors to read, it is best to avoid those that tell you what you

already know, and read those that present vital truths in the plainest way, even in rough and ready language. Others you will find are couched in scholarly and difficult language, but what they say is often based on false conclusions, so that, with great effort, they say nothing worthwhile. I follow Augustine's counsel:

'Give first place to the exposition of the Word so that the soul is given preference over the body. From which, it follows that we seek the more true rather than the more scholarly books, and seek the more sensible rather than the more handsome volumes, and make them our friends.'

As I do in my studies for my edification so I do when teaching others. It turns out to be empty, ignorant men who prefer presentation rather than substance as true learning. They are over-scrupulous and critical about words and style, while the old, experienced, and most learned of men produce works about substantial truths, delivered usually in the plainest of dress. As Aristotle states, 'The reason why women are more addicted to pride in appearance than men is this: feeling of little inward worth, they seek to make up for it with outward borrowed ornaments.' So is it with empty, worthless, preachers who desire to be respected for what they are not, and cannot think of any other way by which they can gain that esteem.'

5. Plain and simple teaching

All our teaching should be as plain and simple as possible. This best suits the teacher's purpose. He that would be understood must speak according to the capacity of his hearers. Truth loves the light, and is most beautiful when appearing naked. It is the sign of an envious enemy to obscure the truth; and it is the work of a hypocrite to hide the truth under the pretence of revealing it. Ornate and obscure sermons, like painted glass in church windows that keep out the light, are too often the marks of painted hypocrites. If you do not wish to teach men, why are you in the pulpit? If you do, why do you not take care in making yourself understood? I know that some weighty truths are difficult to understand, even when we have tried to make them as plain as possible. How can a preacher purposely cloud the matter with long words, and hide his mind from the people he is pretending to instruct? Is he looking for fools to admire his profound learning? It is wise men that will uncover his folly, pride, and hypocrisy. Some preachers conceal their true feelings under the pretence of avoiding men's prejudices and their inability to receive the truth. But truth overcomes prejudice by the light of its evidence, and there is no better way to make a good cause prevail than to make it as plain and as understandable as possible. It is this light that opens up an unreceptive mind. It tells me that a man does not understand what he is talking about if he cannot deliver it clearly to his hearers - I mean, of course, as clearly as the nature of the subject will allow, and taking note of our hearers' capacity to receive the truth. I know that some Christians cannot receive some truths at present, even when you spell them out as plainly as words can express. So use the easiest rules of grammar, and speak as simply as possible, just like a child learning the alphabet.

6. The humility of the pastor

Our work must be carried out in humility. Go about meekly in the presence of your people, and teach in the same way. Be ready to learn from anyone who can teach us, and both teach and learn at the same time. Do not proudly display your own conceits, and scorn anyone who contradicts us as if we had attained to the height of knowledge, and are destined for Moses' chair, so that other men should sit at our feet. Pride is a vice that should not be found in those who lead men in a humble way to heaven.

Let us, therefore, take care, lest, when we have brought others to heaven, the gate proves too narrow for us! Grotius used to say - 'Pride was born in heaven; but forgetting that the way from that place is closed, it is impossible for it to return later!' God, who cast out a proud angel, will not accept a proud preacher. I think we should consider, at least, the title of 'Minister', which, though popish priests hate, yet not us. It is this pride at the root that feeds all the rest of our sins; hence the jealousy, contention and confusion of pastors, and thus their failure to bring in a reformation. All want to be leaders, but few are willing to be followers. Hence, also, comes the failure of so many pastors because they are too proud to learn. Humility will teach them another lesson. I say of pastors, as Augustine did to Jerome, who was the most venerable of them all - 'Although it is more fitting for the aged to teach than to learn, much more is it fitting to learn than to be ignorant.'

7. Severity and mildness

There must be a wise mixture of severity and mildness both in our preaching and in our discipline. Each must come to the fore according to the quality or character of the person or subject that we have taken in hand. If there is no severity, our reproofs will be despised; if we are too severe, we will be seen as power-mad, rather than persuaders of the minds of men for the truth.

8. Zeal

We should be serious, earnest, and zealous in every part of our work. Our work requires greater skill, and, above all, greater life and zeal, than any of us can bring to it. It is no light matter to stand up before a congregation and deliver a message of salvation or condemnation from the living God, and in the name of the Redeemer. It is no easy matter to speak so clearly that the most ignorant will understand, and so seriously that the deadest of hearts will feel alarm, and so convincingly that doubters will be silenced. The weight of our subject condemns coldness and sleepy dullness. We must see that we are fully awake ourselves, and acknowledge that our spirits are in such a state that we are forced to wake others up. Unless our words are as sharp as nails, they will hardly pierce stony hearts. To speak lightly and coldly of heavenly things is as nearly as bad as saying nothing at all.

9. Tender love

The whole of our ministry should be carried forward with tender love for our people. We let them see that nothing pleases us unless it profits them, and that what does them good does us good also, and that nothing grieves us more than when they come to harm. We must feel towards our people like a father towards his children. Yes, the tenderest love of a mother must not be greater than our love. We should travail in birth till Christ is formed in them. (See Galatians 4:19) Let them see that we do not care for any outward thing - not wealth nor liberty nor honour nor life - compared with their salvation. We would be content like Moses to have our names blotted out of the book of life (i.e. removed from the number of the living) rather than that their names should be excluded from the Lamb's book of life. (See Exodus 32:32) So we, as John puts it, should be ready to **'lay down our lives for the brothers'**. (1 John 3:16) We should be able to say, as Paul did to the Ephesian elders - **'... nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus'**. (Acts 20:24) When the people see that we truly love them, they will listen to anything we have to say, and accept anything from us. Augustine says- 'Love God, and do as you like.' We ourselves will take anything from someone who loves us. We will put up with a blow given in love rather than a foul word spoken to us out of malice or anger.

Most men trust the counsel of someone who shows them affection - at least as far as giving it a fair hearing. Oh, see that you nurse in your breast the tenderest love for your people, and let them see it in your speech and conduct! Let them observe that you spend and are spent for their sake, and that all you do is for them and not from any private motives of your own. To this end, do charitable work as far as you can afford it, for bare words hardly convince men that you have any great love for them. But, if you are not able to give very much, show that you are willing to give if you had it, and, above all, do whatever good you can. But see that your love is not like the world, flowing out of pride as from one that is in love with himself rather than Christ, and loves only when he is loved. Take care that you do not deal with the ins and outs of your people under pretence of love, for that would be a perversion of love. Friendship must be cemented with piety. A wicked man cannot be a true friend; and, if you countenance their wickedness, you show that you are wicked yourselves. Do not pretend to love them giving the impression that you favour their sins and are not seeking their salvation. By overlooking their sins, you show enmity against God. So how, then, can you love your brother? If you are really their best friend, help them to combat their worst enemy. And do not think that sharpness is inconsistent with love. Parents correct their children, and God himself '**... loves whom he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.**' (Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6) Augustine says - 'Better it is to love even with the accompaniment of severity than to mislead with too much leniency.'

10. Patience

We should carry out our work with patience. We should bear with many abuses and injuries from those to whom we desire to do good. We watch over them, pray for them, exhort them, beseech them with all tenderness and condescension, give them what we can, and tend them as though they are our own children. Yet we may expect many of them to treat us with scorn and hatred and contempt, and count us as enemies because we tell them the truth. (See Galatians 4:16) Now, we must bear all with patience, and tirelessly go on with our work, '**... in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth**'. (2 Timothy 2:25) We will deal with the distracted who, like bad patients, fly in the face of their physician; but that does not mean that we take our eye off the cure. He is unworthy to be a physician if he is driven away from a frantic patient by foul words. Yes, alas! When sinners reproach and slander us for our love, and are more ready to spit in our faces than to thank us for our advice, what heartaches we experience, and how the remnants of our old Adam (pride and passion) struggle with the humility and patience of the new man! And how poorly many pastors come out of such trials!

11. Reverence

All our work must be done reverently as from those who live in the presence of God, and avoid treating holy things as if they were common. Reverence in the soul proceeds from a deep knowledge of God, and indicates a mind that is close to him. To show irreverence in these things is to reveal hypocrisy, indicating that the heart is not in agreement with the tongue. I do not know how it is with others, but the reverent preacher who speaks as if he had seen the face of God touches my heart even with simple words more than an irreverent man with his most delightful oratory. Yes, although he may shout out with earnestness, unless his fervency is matched with reverence, little will be accomplished. Of all the preaching in the world (unless it is a pack of lies) that I hate the most is preaching that make the hearers laugh, or tickles their ears. (See 2 Timothy 4:3-4) Their hearers are affected as if they were in the theatre, instead of being filled with a holy reverence for the name of God. Jerome says - 'Teach in your church not to get the applause of the people but to set in motion their groans. The tears of the hearers are your praises.' The more God

appears in our duties, the more authority we have among men. We should, as it were, come as if from the throne room of God, having seen the millions of glorious angels that attend him. How awed we are with his majesty when we draw near to him in holy things! How dare we profane him and take his name in vain!

12. Spiritual work

All our work should be done spiritually, as by men possessed by the Holy Spirit. There is in some men's preaching a spiritual tone that spiritual hearers discern and relish, whereas, in other men, this sacred element is so lacking that, even when they speak of spiritual things, they make them uninteresting. Our evidence and illustrations of divine truth must also be spiritual, being drawn from the Holy Scriptures rather than from the writings of men. The wisdom of the world must not be considered greater than the wisdom of God. Philosophy should be taught to stoop and serve while faith holds sway. Great scholars of Aristotle's school should not speak too much of their master and despise those who are more ignorant than them, lest they turn out to be lower in the school of Christ, and **'least in the kingdom of God'**. (Matthew 11:11) Unfortunately, their main desire is to be great in the eyes of men. The wisest man of them all gloried in nothing but the cross of Christ, and determined to **'know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified.'** (1 Corinthians 2:2) Those who say with some assurance that Aristotle has gone to hell should not take him as their guide on the way to heaven. Gregory left us an excellent reminder – 'God, in the first place, gathers together the unlearned, then afterwards the wise ones. And not of orators does he make fishermen, but of fishermen he makes orators.' The most learned of men should take note of this.

Let all writers receive their due esteem, but do not compare any of them with the Word of God. We are not refusing their service, but we hate them if they become rivals or competitors. The sign of a heart that is out of sorts is when it loses its appetite for Scripture. There is, in the believer's heart, a delight in the Word of God because this is the seed that made him born again. (See 1 Peter 1:23) The Word is a seal that produces holy impressions on all the hearts of true believers, and stamps the image of God on them. Therefore, they need to love that Word, highly esteeming it as long as they live.

13. Success

If you would prosper in your work, be sure to have a longing to succeed. If your heart is not in your work, and you do not long to see the conversion and edification of your hearers, you will not preach in hope; so you are not likely to get much success. It is a sign of a false, self-seeking heart when, content with doing many things, it sees no fruit for its labour. I have observed that God seldom blesses any man's work unless his heart looks for success. It is the characteristic of a Judas to think more of the bag than the work, and not to care for those things he pretends to feel deeply about. You would think that if they have a sufficient salary, and the love and commendation of their people, that they would be satisfied. But let all that preach Christ, and long for the salvation of men, remain unsatisfied until they have obtained the things they preach about. No one can be a preacher who is indifferent to obtaining his objectives, and is not grieved when he misses the mark. How can he rejoice in trifling things?

How sad to see a preacher prepare his sermon, and spend an hour in preparation, but think nothing of it afterwards except to know what people think of it! This can go on year after year. I believe that this man only preaches for himself and not for Christ, even when he preaches Christ, however well he manages it. No wise or skilled physician is content to prescribe a medicine and see no improvement in his patient. But to have them all die by

his hands is a catastrophe! No wise and honest teacher is content to carry on teaching if his students do not learn anything from him. Both the doctor and the teacher would soon give up their employment!

I know that a faithful minister looks for comfort when he lacks success: '**And now the Lord says, who formed me from the womb to be his Servant, to bring Jacob back to him, so that Israel is not gathered to him (for I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength)**'. (Isaiah 49:5) God accepts our ministry not according to our fruit but according to our faithful labour. But the one who longs for success in his labours will not feel comfortable without success, and might believe that he is not a faithful labourer. What I say now is only for those who feel like that, and believe they have missed the mark. There is comfort to be had, and that should calm their soul. Does God accept a physician, even when his patient dies? Yet he worked with great compassion, and longed for a better outcome, and was sorry that he did not see it. On our part, it is not just for the reward that we labour, but for other men's salvation. I confess that I marvel at some pastors of old who lived twenty, thirty, or forty years among unprofitable people, yet they saw very little fruit for their labours. How could they be so patient? How could they continue with their work so long? I am tempted into thinking that though I dare not leave the vineyard, nor quit my calling, it might be God's will for me to go somewhere else, and let a better man come in my place. I would definitely not feel that I should carry on any more.

14. Dependence on Christ

Our work should be carried on with a deep sense of our own inadequacy, and a complete dependence on Christ. To him who sent us to the work, we must go for light and life and strength. And when we feel our faith is weak, our hearts dull, and our lives unfit for so great a work, we must come to him and say, 'Lord, how can you send me with such an unbelieving heart to persuade others to believe? Must I daily plead with sinners for everlasting life and everlasting death and have no belief or feeling in these great matters? Oh, do not send me naked and unfit to the work! But, in order to obey your command, furnish me first with a heart for the work.'

Thus prayer must carry on our work as well as our preaching. We cannot preach well to our people unless we pray earnestly for them. If we do not prevail on God to give them faith and repentance, we will never succeed in bringing them to faith and repentance. When our own hearts are so far out of order and theirs also far out of order, and we do not prevail upon God to heal and help them, we are unlikely to be successful in our work.

15. The union and communion of pastors

Having given you pastors some advice about our ministerial calling let me conclude with one more thing as we work together as fellow-labourers in the same work. Be very careful to cultivate union and communion among ourselves, with unity and peace in the churches that we oversee. Be aware how necessary this is for the prosperity of the whole, the strengthening of our common cause, the good of each member of our flock, and the enlargement of the kingdom of Christ. Pastors must feel the hurt when the Church is wounded, and never be the perpetrators of divisions. They should work hard to prevent such wounds, and heal them. Day and night, they must consider how to close such breaches. They should not only respond to appeals for unity but propose them and prosecute them. They should not only rejoice in a possible peace, but pursue it when it is slipping away. To that end, keep close to the ancient simplicity of the Christian faith and the foundation and centre of universal unity. Hate the arrogance of those who invent new ways of torturing and tearing the Church of Christ under the guise of preventing error and

maintaining the truth. Maintain the sufficiency of Scripture, but do not go beyond it when you impose your standards on others. When the papists, or others, make us defend the standard and rule of our faith, it is to the Bible that we go, and not any confessions of the Church or the writings of men. Learn to distinguish between certainties and uncertainties, necessities and unnecessaries, universal spiritual truths and private opinions, and lay stress on the Church's peace when insisting on the former things, not the latter.

Avoid the common error of commending those who make no difference between verbal and real errors. Hate that 'madness formerly among theologians' when they used to charge their brothers with heresy before they understand it themselves. And learn to see the true state of controversies, and bring them to the very point where the differences lie, not making them seem greater than they are. Instead of quarrelling with our brothers, let us make common cause against our enemies. All pastors should associate together, and have fellowship and meet constantly to achieve these ends. Not even small differences of judgement should be allowed to divide them.

They should do as much as they can to further the work of God in unity and peace, calling special councils to prevent division and misunderstanding. They should consult with one another for their mutual good, and maintain love and communion, going on together in the work that God has given them. Had pastors of the gospel been men of peace, and of a united rather than a divisive spirit, the Church of Christ would not be in the state it is in now! The Lutherans and Calvinists abroad, and the different parties here at home, should not be plotting the downfall of each another, nor remain at a distance in uncharitable bitterness, nor give strength to our common enemy, nor hinder the building up and prosperity of the Church.

SECTION 3

MOTIVES FOR THE OVERSIGHT OF THE FLOCK

Having considered some ways in which we should care for the flock, I now suggest some motives for this oversight. Here, I confine myself to those implied in our text (Acts 20:28).

1. The pastor's relationship with his flock

The first thing the text suggests to me comes from our relationship with the flock: we are **'overseers, to shepherd the church of God'**. (28)

(1) The nature of our office requires us to **'take heed to ourselves and to all the flock'**. (28) What else are we overseers for? 'Bishop' is a title related more to 'labour than to honour', says Polydore Virgil: 'To be a bishop, or pastor, is not to be put up as an idol for the people to bow to, or to be an idle slow belly, and to live for fleshly delight and ease; he is to be the guide of sinners to heaven.' It is a sad thing when men follow a calling of which they know nothing, and undertake something of which they remain in ignorance. Do such men ever think about what they have taken on? They live a life of ease and pleasure, and spend time in useless recreations, and waste an hour or so in vain discourse, when there is so much work to be done.

O my brothers! Consider what you have taken on? Why, you have undertaken the conduct under Christ of a band of his soldiers **'against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places.'** (Ephesians 6:12) We lead our people into the fiercest battles; we acquaint them with their enemies, and his wiles and assaults; we watch ourselves, and encourage them to do the same. If we take a wrong step, they might perish. We have a subtle enemy, and so we should be wise. We have a vigilant enemy, and so we should be vigilant. We have a malicious, violent, and untiring enemy, and so we should be resolute, courageous, and untiring. We face many enemies, and are surrounded by them on every side; so, if we do not face them all, we will quickly fall. And oh, what a world of work lies before us!

If you had only one ignorant old man or woman to teach, what a hard task it would be, even though they might be willing to learn! But if they are as unwilling as they are ignorant, how much more difficult does the work prove to be! But to have a multitude of ignorant people, as most of us do, what a work lies before us! What a hard life it is to have to reason with men that have almost lost the use of reason, and to argue with those who neither understand themselves nor you! O my brothers, what a world of wickedness we contend with, even in one soul, and what a number of 'worlds' there are in our congregations! And when you think you have achieved something, the seed is snatched up by the birds of the air. (See Matthew 13) Wicked men at their elbow rise up and contradict all you have said. You speak only once to a sinner, but the emissaries of Satan speak to them twenty times or more.

Moreover, how easily the business and cares of the world choke the seed you have sown! If the truth had no enemy but what exists in the hearts of your hearers, how easily a hardened, worldly heart extinguishes those sparks that you have long been kindling! Indeed, for lack of fuel and further help they can put them out by themselves. And when you think your work is happily succeeding, and have seen men confessing their sins and promising reformation and living as new creatures and zealous converts, alas, they may, in the end, prove unsound and false at heart. They were only superficially changed, and took up new opinions and new company without a new heart. Oh, how many there are, who, after professing faith, are deceived by the profits and honours of the world, and

become again entangled in their former lusts! How many profess a change of life, only to desert for something less dishonourable, and remain untouched in their consciences! How many grow proud before they acquire a thorough knowledge of the faith, and, remain confident in the strength of their unenlightened intellects, greedily snatch at every error that is presented to them under the name of truth?

Like chickens that stray from the mother hen, they are carried off by that infernal eagle, while they proudly refuse the guidance and advice of those that Christ has set over them for their safety! Oh, my brothers, what a field of work lies before us! Every person you see is your work. In the saints themselves, how soon the Christian graces grow dim if you neglect them! How easily are they drawn into sinful ways to the dishonour of the gospel and to their own loss and sorrow! If this is the work of a minister, you can see what kind a life he has to lead. Let us, then, be up and doing with all our might. Difficulties must inspire us, not discourage us, to do this vital work. If we cannot do all, let us do what we can; for, if we neglect our calling, woe to us and to all the souls committed to our care! If we pass over all these duties with a clever sermon, and think we are faithful pastors, and try to deceive God and man with such an empty shell, our reward will prove as empty as our work.

(2) Remember that you took up this work by your own free will. No one forced you to be overseers of the Church. And cannot even common honesty bind you to be true to your trust?

(3) Consider the honour you have that encourages you in your work. It is a great honour to be ambassadors for God. (See 2 Corinthians 5:20) We are the instruments of men's conversion, to save their souls from death, and to cover a multitude of sins. (See James 5:20) The honour comes with the work. To do as many bishops of the Church throughout the ages have done, in jostling for power, and filling the world with strife over the dignity and superiority of their office, is to show that we have forgotten the true nature of the pastoral calling. I seldom see pastors fulfil their office by first going to a poor man's cottage to teach him and his family the way to heaven, or attempt the conversion of a sinner, or become the servant of all. It is strange how, despite all the clear expressions of Christ, men still do not understand the nature of their office. If they did, they would not bother with the question as to who would be pastor of a whole county when there are many thousands of poor sinners crying out for help. How sad that they are neither able nor willing to bring them relief! They are none happier than when they dwell in a house with worldly people and listen to trivial conversation? Yet they would have the name and honour of Bishop of a county, and decline to do parish work. Indeed, the honour comes only with the work. Is it a name and honour, or is it the satisfaction of work done well, that they desire? Oh, if only they would faithfully, humbly, and self-denyingly give themselves to Christ and his Church, and never consider titles and reputation! They would then have honour, whether they would or not. But by grasping after it, they lose it; for this is a case of virtue's shadow – 'What follows I fly; what flies, the same I follow.'

(4) Remember that you have many other excellent privileges in the pastoral office to encourage you in the work. If you will not do the work, you will lose its privileges. It is something when you are supported by other men's labours. But they do it to relieve you, not to take the work away from you. Paul commands that we should give ourselves wholly to these things. So do not neglect men's souls while you are pampering your own bodies. Either do the work, or receive no pay. But work brings you the enjoyment of great privileges. Is it nothing to you to be brought up to learning when others are brought up to the cart and the plough? You enjoy so much delightful knowledge while the world lies in ignorance. Is it nothing to you that you talk to learned men, and speak of high and glorious things, when others have no one to talk to except the most common and ignorant men.

And then, what a great privilege is it to spend your time studying and preaching Christ! What a blessing to be continually searching into his mysteries, or feeding on them, and employing ourselves daily considering the blessed nature, works, and ways of God!

Others are glad of the leisure of the Lord's Day, and an hour now and then during the week when convenient. But we may have a continual Sabbath. We can do almost nothing else but study and speak of God and his glory, and engage in acts of prayer and praise, and drink in his sacred saving truths. Our employment is all high and spiritual. Whether we are alone or in company, our business is with another world. Oh, that our hearts were more tuned to this work! What a blessed, joyful life we should live! How sweet our study should be to us! How pleasant the prospect of the pulpit! And what delight we have in our conferences about spiritual and eternal things! To live with such excellent helps as our libraries afford, and to have so many silent wise companions to call on whenever we please; all these, and many other similar privileges of the ministry, should spur us on to unsparing diligence in the work.

(5) By your work, you are related to Christ as well as to his flock. You are the stewards of his mysteries and rulers of his household; and he who entrusted you with the work will keep you in it. But then, **'It is required in a steward that one be found faithful.'** (1 Corinthians 4:2) Remain true to him, and never doubt that he will remain true to you. Feed his flock and he will feed you, as he did Elijah. If you are in prison, he will open the doors; and then you will be able to relieve imprisoned souls. He will give the righteous wisdom and a tongue (see Psalm 37:30) that no enemy will be able to resist him. But you must use your gifts faithfully for him. If you stretch out your hand to relieve the distressed, he will know where the hand is that is stretched out against you. The pastors of England, I am sure, know this from experience. Many a time God has rescued them from the jaws of the devourer. Oh, what a wonderful preservation and deliverance they used to receive from cruel Papists, from tyrannical persecutors, and from misguided, passionate men! Consider, my brothers, why God did this. Is it for you, or is it for his Church? What are you to him more than others? He blesses you for the sake of his work and his people. Are you angels? Is your flesh formed from better clay than your neighbours? Are you not of the same generation of sinners, and do you not need his grace as much as they? Up then, and work as the redeemed of the Lord, as those who have been purposely rescued from ruin for his service! If you believe that God has rescued you for himself, live for him without reservation, the One who delivered you.

2. The Holy Spirit

The second motive in our text is drawn from the cause of this relationship. It is the Holy Spirit who made us overseers in the Church. Therefore, we should be careful in our office. The Holy Spirit makes men bishops (or overseers) in the Church in three ways:

(1) by qualifying them for the office;

(2) by directing those who, after judging their qualifications, ordain them, and so select the worthiest of men;

(3) by charging them, both the people and their pastors, to carry out the office.

In the Old Testament, all these things came in an extraordinary way through inspiration. The same things now come in the ordinary way with the Spirit's assistance. However, he is the same Holy Spirit; and men are made overseers in the Church now, as then, by him. It is the strange belief of the Papists that ordination by the hands of man is more necessary for the pastoral office than the calling of the Holy Spirit. God has declared in his

Word that there is such an office, and what the work and authority of that office should be, and what sort of qualifications men need to fill the office. None of these things can be undone by man or made unnecessary. God also gives men the qualifications they need. So all that the Church has to do, whether pastors or people, ordainers or electors, is to discern and determine the men whom God has qualified, accept what he has provided, and, with the agreement of all, install them solemnly into the office.

What an obligation, then, is laid on us in our call to the work! If our commission comes from heaven, it cannot be disobeyed. When the apostles were called by Christ out of their secular employment, they immediately left their friends and houses and trades, and followed him. When Paul was called by the voice of Christ, he **'was not disobedient to the heavenly vision'**. (Acts 26:19) Though our call is not so immediate or extraordinary, yet it is from the same Spirit. It is not safe to imitate Jonah and turn our backs on the command of God. If we neglect our work, he spurs us on, and enlivens us. If we run away from it, he has enough messengers to overtake us and bring us back, and make us do it. How much better it is to do it at first rather than at the last!

3. The Church

The third motive in our text is drawn from the dignity of what is committed to our care. It is the Church of God that we oversee, that Church for which the world is chiefly upheld, and which is sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and is the mystical body of Christ. This is the Church the angels behold, and on which they attend as ministering spirits, whose little ones have their angels beholding the face of God in heaven. (See Matthew 18:10) Oh, what a charge it is that we have undertaken! And shall we be unfaithful to it? Have we not the stewardship of God's own family; and dare we neglect it? Should we not imitate the conduct of those saints who live forever with God in glory?

I beg you, my brothers, let this thought wake you up if you are negligent. If you are drawing back from painful and displeasing duties, and are putting off men's souls with casual formality, do you think this is an honourable way to treat Christ's bride? Are the souls of men excluded from seeing God face-to-face and living forever in heaven? Are they not worthy of your utmost cost and care on earth? Do you think so little of the Church of God as if she did not deserve the best of your care and help? If you were the keepers of sheep or swine, you would hardly allow them to stray by saying, 'They are not worth looking after', especially if they were your own! How dare you say this of the souls of men, and of the Church of God! Christ walks among them; so remember his presence, and see that you are diligent in the work. We are **'... a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may show proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'**. (1 Peter 2:9) And yet you neglect them. What a high honour is it to be one of them, even as **'a door-keeper in the house of our God'**. (Psalm 84:10) But to be a priest of the priests, and a ruler of these kings – that is an honour that multiplies your obligation to work with diligence and faithfulness in so noble a cause.

4. The price paid for the Church

The last motive mentioned in our text is connected with the price that was paid for the Church that we oversee - **'... which God'**, says the apostle, **'has purchased with his own blood.'** (Acts 20:28) Oh, what an argument there is here to quicken the negligent and condemn those who are remiss in their duties! 'Oh', says one of the ancient doctors, 'if Christ had only committed to my keeping one spoonful of his blood in a fragile glass, how carefully I would have preserved it, and how tenderly I would have looked after that glass!

If, then, he has committed to me what his blood has purchased, should I not just as carefully look after my charge?’

What, gentlemen! Shall we despise the blood of Christ? Do we think that it was not shed for those who are worthy of our utmost care? Now see here, it is not a little fault that negligent pastors are guilty of. If it had been left to them, the blood of Christ would have been shed in vain. They would lose him those souls that he has purchased so dearly.

Well, then, let us listen to these arguments of Christ whenever we feel ourselves grow dull and careless:

Did I not die for these souls, and will you not look after them? Were they worth my blood, and are they not worth your labour? Did I not come down from heaven to earth **‘to save that which was lost’**? (Matthew 18:11) And will you not go next door, or into the street, or to the village, to seek them out? How small is your condescension and labour compared with mine! I debased myself for this; so is it not your honour to do the same? Have I not done and suffered so much for their salvation? Was I not willing to make you a fellow-worker with me, and yet you refuse to do the little that lies in your hands?’

Every time you look at your congregation, remember that they are the purchase of Christ’s blood. Regard them with the deepest interest and the tenderest affection. Oh, think what confusion there will be when negligent pastors, at the last day, will have the blood of the Son of God plead against them, and Christ will say, ‘It was the purchase of my blood that you made light of. Do you expect to be saved by it yourself?’ O brothers, will Christ’s blood plead against you there? Rather, let it plead you to your duty lest it plead you to your condemnation.

I have now finished with the motives I find in our text. There are many more that could be found from the rest of the exhortations of the apostle to the Ephesian elders, but we do not have the time to take it all in. If the Lord placed only a few of them in your hearts, I do not doubt that you would have reason for reforming your lives. The change would be so great in your hearts and in your ministry that your congregation would have just cause to bless God for it. I know I am unworthy to be your teacher, but a teacher you must have. It is better for you to hear of your sins and duties from someone rather than no one. Accept this counsel, for you have no excuse for refusing it. But if you do reject it, this most unworthy messenger will bear such a witness against you on the last day that you will be amazed.

CHAPTER 3

APPLICATION

Outline:

SECTION 1. THE USE OF HUMILIATION

1. The sin of pride
2. Our sin of negligence
3. Worldliness
 - (1) Power hungry pastors
 - (2) An emphasis on worldly things
 - (3) Money and works of charity
4. Peace and unity in the Church
5. Church discipline

SECTION 2. THE DUTY OF PERSONALLY CATECHISING AND INSTRUCTING THE FLOCK

ARTICLE 1. MOTIVES FROM THE BENEFITS OF THE WORK

1. The importance of personal work
2. Personal work builds up the converted
3. Personal work adds to public preaching
4. Personal work brings knowledge to your people
5. Personal work is a spiritual work
6. Personal work reveals spiritual needs
7. Personal work is part of the pastoral office
8. Personal work brings a greater commitment
9. Personal work touches the leaders of our country
10. Personal work eases pastoral work
11. Personal work benefits family life
12. Personal work combats idleness
13. Personal work brings many benefits
14. Personal work deals with reality
15. Personal work is part of a reforming work
16. Personal work is a good example to others
17. Personal work and national reformation

ARTICLE 2. MOTIVES FROM THE BENEFITS OF THE WORK

1. The difficulties that lie in ourselves
2. Difficulties we meet in our people

ARTICLE 3. MOTIVES FROM THE NECESSITY OF THE WORK

1. Personal work is necessary for the glory of God
2. Personal work is necessary for the welfare of your people
3. Personal work is necessary for your own welfare

ARTICLE 4. THE APPLICATION OF THESE MOTIVES

1. What good reason can we give the Lord today for our neglect?
2. The denial of our flesh

ARTICLE 5. NINE OBJECTION TO PERSONAL WORK

SECTION 3. ACTS 20: PAUL'S SPEECH TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS AT MILETUS

ARTICLE 1. ON SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING

1. The example of the Pastor
2. The importance of preaching
3. He use of a catechism
4. Practicalities

ARTICLE 2. ON SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING IN PARTICULAR

1. Be friendly and encouraging
2. Conversation
3. Learning the catechism
4. Questions on the catechism
5. Practical application
6. Making converts
7. Speaking to the unconverted
8. Believing in Christ and what follows
9. End with an expression of pastoral care
10. Keeping records
11. Suiting your teaching to the one being counselled
12. Graciousness

SECTION 1

THE USE OF HUMILIATION

Reverend and beloved brothers, our business here today is to humble our souls before the Lord for our negligent past days, and to implore God's assistance in our work in the times to come. Indeed, we hardly expect the latter without the former. If God would help us in our future duty, he must first humble us for our past sins. Whoever is not conscious of his faults enough to lament them will prove difficult to move towards reform. Even the sorrow of repentance may not necessarily mean a change of heart and life, for it is easier to feel a strong emotion than experience true change. However, change will not take place without some measure of sorrow. Indeed, here we begin our confessions. It is too common with us to expect repentance from our people when we do little or nothing about it in our own case. What pains we take to humble our people when we remain unhumiliated!

How hard we preach at them to wring out a few repentant tears (alas, all too few), while our own eyes remain dry! What an example of hard-heartedness we show them while, by our words, we endeavour to melt and move them! Oh, if we worked half as hard on touching and changing our own hearts as we do with those of our hearers, we would not be in the state we are today! We do far too little to humiliate our people, but I fear we do even less for our own souls. Too many try to do something for other men's souls while they seem to forget that they have souls of their own to care for. They carry on thinking that their work is to call on others to repent. They look for tears and sorrow in others, and see their task in crying down sin. They call out to the people to forsake sin, which they see as their main duty. However, they do not practise what they preach.

We find that the guides of the Church as recorded in Scripture confessed their own sins as well as the sins of the people. Ezra confessed the sins of the priests, as he did of the people, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God. (See Ezra 10:1) Daniel confessed his sin as well as the people's sins. (See Daniel 9:3-19) I think that when we come to sum up the duties we have dealt with already, we will see how badly we perform them. There is no doubt that we are in need of humiliation. I must say this, though I condemn myself for saying it, that whoever reads this exhortation of Paul to the elders of the church at Ephesus (in Acts 20), and compares his life with it, must be stupid or hard-hearted if he is not moved to admit his neglect. Should we not lie down in the dust before God, and bewail our great faults, and flee for refuge to the blood of Christ and God's pardoning grace? I take it, my brothers, that none of you approve of the libertine doctrine that denies the need for confession, guilt, and humiliation, and even the pardon of sin! What a pity, then, that our hearts are not as orthodox as our heads! I suggest that we have half-learned our lesson when we can admit it, and say so. When the understanding has learned it, we must go on to teach our wills and hearts, our eyes, our tongues, and our hands. It is a sad thing that so many of us preach our hearers asleep; but it is sadder still if we have prepared and preached ourselves asleep! We speak so long against men's hardness of heart that our own heart has been hardened under the noise of our own reproofs. In order that you may see that God has a right to expect sorrow from us, I call to your remembrance your many sins, and set them in order before you that we may deal plainly and faithfully in a free confession of them: **If we confess our sins, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**' (1 John 1:8)

I take it that you heartily agree with this verse. I am sure you are far from being offended with me for pointing it out, though I might humble you in the pastoral office. You must readily admit the charge, and, in humility, accuse yourselves. Now, as far as I am from

justifying myself by accusing others, I readily put my name first on the great bill of indictment. How can any wretched sinner, chargeable with so large a number of transgressions, presume to justify himself before God? Or, on the contrary, how can he plead 'not guilty' when his conscience says so much against him? If I bring shame on the ministry, it is not on the office itself, but on ourselves when I speak of our shameful sin. The glory of our high employment brings no honour to our sin, for **'sin is a reproach to any people'**. (Proverbs 14:34) Be they pastors or people, **'He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy'** (Proverbs 28:13); while **'he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity.'** (Proverbs 28:14) The great sins of which we are guilty I will not go into. However, my passing over any particular one should not be taken as a denial or justification of the charge. However, I consider it my task to instance a few of those that cry out loudly for humiliation and speedy reformation.

Firstly, I must say this: notwithstanding all the faults that could be instanced among us, I do not believe that England has ever had so able and faithful a ministry as today since it became a nation. I am sorry that so few nations on earth can say the same. I am sure that the great change in the ministry that has occurred these past twelve years is one of the greatest joys that has ever come about. Oh, how many congregations are now clearly and frequently taught when once they lived in deep darkness! How many able, faithful men there are now, as compared with former days? How graciously God has prospered the studies of many young men who were small children at the beginning of our national troubles! Now, they outshine most of their seniors! How many miles would I have travelled twenty years ago, and even less, to hear one of those ancient, reverend divines whose congregations had grown thin! But now we see a great improvement in their juniors!

In particular, how mercifully the Lord has dealt with my poor county of Worcester in raising up so many preachers who do credit to the sacred office, and give themselves unsparingly for the good of souls! I bless the Lord who has placed me in such a neighbourhood where I enjoy the brotherly fellowship of so many able, faithful, humble, united, and peaceful men. Oh, that the Lord would long continue this admirable mercy in our unworthy county! And I rejoice in God while I have my being for the many changes I have lived to see in other parts. There are hundreds of faithful men who are hard at work for the saving of souls, despite the muttering and gnashing of teeth on the part of the enemy. And many more are springing up at a great rate. I know there are some men, whom I respect, who have a very different view of church government than mine. They would be offended at my mentioning this difference, but, if I were a bishop, I would do nothing but rejoice in them. What, not rejoice at the prosperity of the Church because men differ in the way it is ordered! Can I shut my eyes against the mercies of the Lord? Are the souls of men so contemptible to me that I should forbid them to accept the bread of life because it was not broken with a hand authorised by a bishop?

Oh, that every congregation were so well-served! But everything cannot be done at once. Our bishops have had a hard time sorting out a corrupted ministry; and when the ignorant and scandalous are cast out, we cannot create abilities in others to make up for their number. We must wait for their time of preparation and growth; and then, if England does not reject their gospel ministry and hate the light and wilfully refuse to reform, we will be the happiest nation under heaven. As for all the sects and heresies that are creeping in and troubling us daily, I do not doubt that the gospel, preached by able, self-denying pastors, will eventually disperse the darkness, and shame them all.

But you may say, 'You are not speaking about the confession of sin, you are applauding those whose sins you are pointing out.' To this, I answer, 'It is the due acknowledgement of God's kindness, and thanksgiving for his admirable mercies, that I am thankful for in this

confession. I am not putting a cloud over God's grace when I point out the frailties of his pastors. For many things are sadly out of order in the best of us, as I hope to prove.

The sin of pride

One of the most dreadful and obvious of sins is PRIDE. This is a sin too often found in the best of us but is more hateful and inexcusable in pastors than in other men. Yet is it so prevalent in some of us that it enters our discussions, chooses our company, is seen on our faces, and puts an emphasis on our words. It fills some men's minds with aspiring desires and designs. It fills them with envy and bitter thoughts against those who stand in their way, or, by any means, eclipse their glory, or hinder the progress of their reputation. Oh, what a constant companion, what a tyrannical commander, what a sly and subtle enemy, is this sin of pride! It goes with men to the clothes' shop and the tailor and chooses their clothes, their accessories, and their fashion. Few pastors would think for a moment of hairstyle fashion if it were not for the commands of this dictating vice. And I wish this is all; but it gets worse!

Alas, how frequently pride gets into our study, and sits there with us, and even does our work! How often does it choose our subject, and, very frequently, our reading and words! God commands us to be as simple as we can that we may teach the ignorant. We should be as convincing and as serious as we can so as to melt and change hardened hearts. But pride stands by and contradicts all our fine words, and produces toys and trifles. It pollutes rather than polishes; and, under pretence of fine words, it dishonours our sermons with childish stories, like a prince dressed up as an actor, or a painted fool. Pride persuades us to paint the window and dim the light; to speak to our people of things they cannot understand; and to let them know that we are pleased to show off our great scholarship. If we have a plain and convicting passage, it takes the edge off it, and dulls the life of our preaching under pretext of smoothing away any roughness, unevenness, and extravagance in our speech. When God charges us to deal with men for their very lives, and to appeal to them with all the earnestness at our command, this cursed sin of pride takes control of us and condemns the most holy commands of God, saying to us, 'What! Will you not make the people think you are mad? Will you not make them say that you are ranting and raving? Why do you not speak soberly and moderately?'

That is how pride makes many a fine sermon; and what pride produces, the devil uses, and what sermons the devil makes, and to what end, we can easily guess. Though the content of the sermon is of God, yet, if the dress and manner is from Satan, we will have no hope of success. And when pride has made the sermon, it goes with us into the pulpit, forms our tone, and dictates how we should deliver it. It diverts us from whatever could be displeasing, however necessary, and sends us in pursuit of vain applause. In short, both in their studying and in their preaching, pride makes men seek their own glory and not God's. They must ask themselves, 'What shall I say, and how shall I say it, to please God and do the greatest good.' Instead, they say, 'What shall I say, and how shall I deliver it, so that my people will think I am a learned preacher, and praise me for what they hear?' When the sermon is over, pride goes home with the preacher and makes him more anxious to know whether he did well, rather than travail for the saving of souls. Were it not for shame, the preacher would ask his people how they liked his sermon, and draw out their praise. When he sees that he is highly thought of, he rejoices, having attained his end; but if he sees that he is considered a weak and commonplace preacher, he is displeased, and feels that he has missed the prize he had in mind.

But even this is not all - not the worst by a long chalk, if there is a worst. Oh, that it should ever be said of godly pastors that they are so jealous of their reputation and the estimation of men that they envy the talents and reputation of their brothers who are more gifted than

they are! They feel that praise has been taken away from them and given to someone else. It is as if God had given them his gifts to be used as mere ornaments and trappings for *their* name's sake, so that they may walk as men of repute in the world. From their point of view, all of God's gifts that are found in others must then be trodden down and despised, for they stand in the way of their fame. What kind of saint, what kind of preacher of Christ, could envy anyone who has within him the image of Christ, and malign the gifts that bring glory to God? They do this because it stands in the way of their personal glory. Is not every true Christian a member of the body of Christ, and, therefore, partaker of the blessings of the whole, and of each particular member? Does not everyone owe thanks to God for his brother's gifts, not only as having himself a part in them, as the foot has the benefit of the guidance of the eye, but also because his own ends may be attained by his brother's gifts? No, no! If the glory of God, and the Church's happiness, is not his end, he is not a Christian.

Will any workman defame another because he has helped him do his master's work? Yet, alas, how common is this wicked crime among the pastors of Christ! They secretly foul the reputation of those who stand in their own way. Whatever they are ashamed to do and say in public, lest they be proved liars and slanderers, they do in secret. By malicious whispers, they raise suspicion where they cannot make accusations. And some go as far as to exclude from their pulpits anyone who is better than them for fear they should be praised more than they are. What a fearful thing it is for any man, who has at least some fear of God, to so envy God's gifts that he would prefer that his worldly hearers remain unconverted, and the drowsy unawakened, than it should be done by someone else. Yes; so greatly does this wretched vice prevail, that in large congregations, which have need of the help of many preachers, we can hardly find two of them living together in love and peace, and carrying forward the work of God in unity.

Yet unless one of them confesses that he is inferior to the other, and is content to be thought so, and, like a curate, is willing to be ruled by a superior, they will battle for precedence, envy one another, and act coldly and jealously toward one another. This brings great shame on their profession and great wrong to their people. I am ashamed to think of it, but when I have worked hard to convince people of high repute and intelligence of the great need for more pastors in a large congregation, they tell me that they would never agree with each other! I hope this objection is unfounded; but I fear that it is true too often. Indeed, some pastors are so far gone in their pride that, when they might obtain an able assistant to further the work of God, they would rather take on the full burden on themselves (though they cannot bear any more). They cannot bear the thought that anyone should share with them the honour of the work, or that the esteem of the people should be diminished.

That is why men proclaim their own opinions, and are critical of anyone who differs from them in lesser things, as if it were all right to differ from them when their opinions come from God! They expect that all should conform to their judgement, as if they were the rulers of the Church's faith. And while we cry down papal infallibility, too many of us want to be little popes, and have everyone bow down before us as if we were infallible. It is true that we have more modesty than to say this; but we pretend that we have the only evidence of truth, and we expect others to yield to us, 'For our zeal' we declare, 'is for the truth, and not for ourselves.' But as our declarations must not be taken for the truth, so our reasons must not necessarily be valid. However, when they are freely examined, and are found to be wrong (how slow we are to agree!), we are angry it is proved openly. We have so identified ourselves with our errors that, when they are spoken against, we take the criticism personally, and feel bad when our arguments that injure the truth and the souls of men are thoroughly confounded. This all comes down to pride. One way that we defend our views is to attribute them to the patronage of a reverend name (this is nothing rare), so

that we must have the victory, and others must give way to the truth, or else injure the name that patronises them. Though we have no personal argument against our critics (we say), we make our criticisms personal, and say they are weak arguments, all in the hearing of others. If, therefore, you consider it your duty to shame their errors and false reasonings by exposing their nakedness, they will take it that you are shaming them personally. Such critics would have their names upheld as a garrison or fortress against error, and their 'authority' should keep them immune from attack.

So far as we are concerned, when it becomes the duty of anyone to reprove or contradict us, we become impatient both with the substance of the argument and the manner of its delivery. We love the man who says what we say, and is of our opinion, and promotes our reputation, though, in other respects, he is less worthy of our esteem. But he is surely ungrateful when he contradicts us, differs from us, speaks plainly to us when we are wrong, and tells us our faults. In public debates, when the eyes of the world are upon us, we can hardly endure any contradiction or plain dealing. I know that invective should be avoided, and that we should be as tender of each other's reputation as our faithfulness to the truth will permit. But our pride all too often makes us feel that all men are condemning us when they make it plain that they do not admire our views, which, according to their judgement, are mistaken. We are so sensitive that no one who touches us can do so without hurting us. We are so high-minded that a man not well-versed in compliments and skilled in flattery hardly knows how to handle us, and fails our expectation at every turn. Some word or some expression is omitted, and immediately our spirits fasten on it and take it as an attack on our honour.

I confess that I have often wondered why this wicked sin should be passed over so lightly, and thought consistent with a holy way of heart and life, when some lesser sins are proclaimed as damnable in our people. I have often wondered at the difference between godly preachers and ungodly sinners in this respect. When we speak to drunkards, worldlings, or ignorant unconverted people, we shame them to the utmost, and lay it on as clearly as we can, and tell them of their sin and shame and misery. We expect them not only to bear our words patiently, but accept them thankfully. And those that I deal with do take it patiently. Many great sinners praise the plainest preachers most, and say that they do not care for the man who will not tell them their sins. However, when we speak to godly pastors of their sins, and do not praise them, and show them no respect, and do not speak to them tactfully - indeed, if we do not include commendation in our reproofs, and applause to take the sting out of our reproof - they take it as a mortal insult. My brothers, I know this is a sad confession, but that such people should live among us is more worrying than the sins I have already mentioned. If this evil could have been kept hidden, I would not have disclosed it - at least not so openly in the eyes of all. But, alas! It was paraded openly long ago before the eyes of the world. We have dishonoured ourselves by idolising our honour. We publish our shame, and preach our shame, thus declaring it to the whole world. Some will think that I speak over-charitably when I call such persons 'godly' men, and when such a great sin dominates them. I know, indeed, that wherever it prevails, and fails to be detested, bewailed, and mortified, there is no true godliness. I beseech everyone here to carefully search his heart concerning this matter. But if all are without grace that are guilty of any show of pride, may the Lord have mercy on the pastors of this land, and quickly give them another spirit, for grace is rarer than most of us suppose! Yet I say this: that I do not mean to bring all pastors of Christ under this charge. To the praise of divine grace, it might be said, we have some among us who are eminent in humility and meekness, and who, in all respects, are fine examples to their flocks and to their brothers. This is their glory, and shall be their glory; and it makes them truly honourable and lovely in the eyes of God and all good men, and even in the eyes of the ungodly themselves. Oh, that the rest of us were like that! But, alas! This is not the case.

Oh, that the Lord would lay us down at his feet, where, with tears, we will show sincere sorrow for this sin! My brothers, let me put the case a little before my heart and yours, that together we may see the sinfulness of our sin and be reformed! Is not *pride* the sin of devils, and the first-born of hell? Is not pride the chief mark of Satan's image? And can it be tolerated in men who are supposed to be engaged in God's work and kingdom, as we are? The very purpose of the gospel is to humble us; and the work of grace is begun and carried out in humiliation. Humility is not a mere ornament of a Christian but an essential part of the new creature. It is a contradiction in terms to be a Christian and not be humble. All who would be Christians must be Christ's disciples and come to him to '**learn**' of him. (Matthew 11:28-29) The lesson that he teaches them is to be '**gentle and lowly of heart**', as he is. Oh, how many precepts and wonderful examples our Lord and Master have been given us for this purpose!

Now we see him washing and wiping his disciples' feet, yet was he not their lord and master? (John 13:5) He spoke to the lowest of people, yet we often treat them as below our notice, and associate with the wealthy and honourable in our society? How many of us are more often found in the houses of gentlemen than in the cottages of the poor? Yet it is the poor who dearly need our help. There are many of us who think it beneath us to go daily to the most needy and beggarly people, instructing them in the way of life and salvation. Are we to look after only the souls of the rich? Alas! What have we to be proud of? Is it our body? Why, is it not made of the same material as the animals? And will it not end up soon as a rotting carcass in the grave? And what shall we say about our graces? Why, the more we are proud of them, the less we should be proud of them. When so much of the nature of grace consists in humility, it is absurd to be proud of them.

Does this come from our knowledge and learning? Why, if we have any knowledge at all, we would know the reasons why we should be humble. And, if we know more than others, we should have all the more reason than others to be humble. How little the learned know in comparison with what they do not know! To know that you over-reach yourself, and to know how ignorant you are, is a great blow to your pride. However, do not the devils know more than you, and can you be proud of something the devils excel in? Our very business is to teach the great lesson of humility to our people. How wrong it is, then, that we should be proud of ourselves! We should study humility, and preach humility, and, above all, possess and practice humility. A proud preacher of humility is self-condemned. How sad that so vile a sin is not so easily detected in us! Many who are proud condemn this sin in others and yet take no notice of it in themselves! The world takes note of us when we are high-minded, when we seek for the highest status, and live like rulers, and when we are overbearing wherever we go, and when there is no living with us. In any discussion, they come not to search after truth, but to dictate to others who, perhaps, are more capable of teaching them. In a word, they have such an arrogant, domineering spirit that the world is scandalised. Yet they cannot see it!

My brothers, I want to closely examine my own heart and yours. I beg you to consider whether it is best to speak of the grace of humility when we do not possess it, or speak against the sin of pride while we indulge it. Are we really sincere when we feel so much pride in ourselves? We tell the drunkard that he cannot be saved unless he lives a sober life, and the fornicator that he cannot be saved unless he becomes pure. Should we not say to ourselves that there is no salvation for us until we become humble? Pride, in fact, is a sin worse than drunkenness or sex; and humility is as necessary as sobriety and chastity. Truly, my brothers, a man can as much make haste to hell when he is earnestly preaching the gospel and advocating a holy life as a drunkard and an impure man. For what is holiness, but devotion to God and living for him? And what is a damnable state but devotion to oneself, and living for oneself?

Does anyone live more to himself or less to God than a proud man? And does not pride make a preacher study for himself, and pray and preach for himself, and live for himself, even when he seems to surpass others in his labours? It is not the work, but the right motive, that proves us righteous. The work may be God's, but we may do it not for God but for ourselves. I confess that I feel myself in such great danger on this point that, if I do not watch out, I may study for myself, and preach for myself, and write for myself, rather than for Christ. And I will be found out. After all, I am not justifying myself when I condemn sin. I beg you, brothers, to consider what traps there are in the work of the ministry, snaring a man into selfishness even in his highest works of piety. The fame of a godly man is as great a snare as the fame of a learned man. But woe to him who loves the *fame* of godliness more than godliness! I say to you honestly, '**... they have their reward**'. (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16) When the times are full of learning and empty formality, the temptation of the proud will tend in that direction.

But now, when, through the unspeakable mercy of God, the liveliest practical preaching is in credit, and godliness itself is also in credit, the temptation of the proud is to pretend to be zealous preachers and godly men. Oh, what a fine thing is it to have the people crowding in to hear us, hanging on our every word, and showering us with their praise and affection! What a marvellous thing is it to be known as the ablest and godliest man in the country, and famous throughout the land for our high spiritual attainment! Alas, my brothers, a little grace polluted with such praise will put you in the front rank of those who hinder the cause of Christ in the world. Oh, yes! Pride will do it without any special grace. So watch yourself carefully; and, in all your studies, be sure to study humility. '**Whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.**' (Luke 14:11; 18:14) I have often noticed that almost everyone, whether good or bad, loathes the proud and loves the humble. That is an example of pride contradicting itself! Conscious of its own deformity, it often puts on the homely dress of humility. We have much cause to be jealous of it because it is a sin deeply rooted in our nature, and is extremely difficult to pluck out of the soul.

Our sin of negligence

We do not do the work of the Lord as seriously as we might in the ministry. I bless the Lord that there are many here that do it with all their might. But, alas! How imperfectly and how negligently most of us do it, even those we take as godly pastors! How few of us behave in our office as men who are wholly dedicated to it, and give all their time to it! To allow you to judge the grounds of this charge, I will give you some instances of our sinful neglect.

If we were fully devoted to our work, we would not be so negligent in our studies. Few men take care to read the best books that will equip them for their work. Some take no pleasure in study, but read now and then for an hour as an unwelcome task that they are forced to undergo, and are glad when they are set free from its yoke. What has happened to our natural desire to acquire knowledge, and our spiritual desire to know God and things divine, and our consciousness that we are ignorant and weak, and our sense of the heavy responsibility of our pastoral work? Will none of all these things keep us close to our studies and make us take care as we seek after truth? Oh, what abundance of things there are for a minister to know! What a great defect is it to be ignorant of them! How exposed we are when we go about our work with so little knowledge!

Many pastors prepare only their sermons, and study very little else. There are so many books to be read and so many things that we need to know. Indeed, even when we are preparing our sermons, we are much too lazy, gathering only a few bare truths and not learning the most forceful expressions by which to hammer them home on men's

consciences and hearts. Let us study how to convict men, and how to bring each truth home to their hearts. Let us not leave these things to the last minute except in the case of necessity. Certainly, my brothers, experience teaches you that men are not made learned or wise without hard study and tireless labour and experience.

Preaching with urgency

If we were heartily devoted to our work, we would go to it more vigorously and seriously than usual. How few pastors preach with all their might, or speak of everlasting joys and everlasting torments in such a way that their hearers believe that they are in earnest! It makes a man's heart ache to see a congregation of dead and drowsy sinners sitting under a minister, and not hearing a word that would quicken or awaken them. Alas! We speak so sleepily and so quietly that sinners cannot hear us. The blow falls so lightly that hard-hearted sinners cannot feel it. Most pastors will not so much as lift up their voice and stir themselves to utter an urgent word. But if they did speak loud and earnestly, how few of them could match their call with gravity and urgency? Yet without this, the voice will do no good. The people will count it as mere noise when the content does not correspond with the preaching. It grieves one's heart to hear what excellent teaching some pastors give; yet they let it wither in their hands for lack of practical application. What great arguments they use for convincing sinners, yet how little it touches them! What good they might do if they drove their words home; yet they cannot or will not do it!

Reverend gentlemen, how plainly, how personally, how earnestly, we should deliver a message of such moment as ours, when the everlasting life or everlasting death of our fellow men is involved! I believe that there is nothing so lacking as seriousness. There is nothing more unsuitable for preaching the gospel than to be light and humorous. What! Dare we speak coldly about God and the salvation of men! Do we believe that our people must be converted or condemned, yet we speak with a drowsy tone? In the name of God, my brothers, wake up your hearts before you go into the pulpit that you may be fit to awaken the hearts of sinners. Remember that they must be awakened or damned, and that a sleepy preacher is unlikely to wake up sleepy sinners. Though you give the holy things of God the highest praise in your words, yet, if you do it coldly, you will seem by your manner to unsay what you have said on the subject. It is a kind of contempt of great things to speak of them with little affection and fervency. The preaching, as well as the words, must be designed to put them straight. If we are commanded, **'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might'** (Ecclesiastes 9:10), then certainly such a work as preaching for men's salvation should be done with all our might.

But, alas! How few in numbers are such men! It is only here and there, even among good pastors, that we find one who has an earnest, persuasive, powerful way of speaking, so that the people are moved under his preaching whenever they hear him.

I am not recommending that you shout in your preaching (for that would be a false fervency), but see that you speak seriously. When the subject requires it (as it should, in the application at least), lift up your voice and show some animation. Speak to your people as though they need to be woken up - either here or in hell! Look around them with the eye of faith and compassion, and think of them either in joy or torment forever. I think this will make you preach in earnest, and melt your heart with a sense of their condition. Oh, do not speak one cold or careless word about so great a business as heaven or hell! Whatever you do, let the people see that you are in earnest. So, my brothers, there is a great work to be done, and you must not think that trifling words will discharge it. You will not break men's hearts by joking with them, or telling them interesting stories, or delivering a wordy oration. Men will not forsake their dearest pleasures at the drowsy request of a preacher who seems not to mean what he says, or cares whether his plea is answered or

not. If you say that the work is God's, and he can use the weakest means to achieve it, I answer, 'That is true, he may do so.' But his usual way of working is by using means that are most suited to what is preached.

With most of our hearers, the very pronunciation and tone of voice is of great interest. The best subject will hardly touch them until it is delivered with feeling. But see in particular that you do not preach in an affected voice, but speak familiarly to them, as if you were talking to them all personally. The lack of familiar tone and expression is a great fault in most of our sermons, and something we should watch carefully. When a preacher reads or declaims like a schoolboy saying his lesson or making a speech, few will be moved by anything he says. Therefore, let us be up and doing in the work of the Lord, and speak to our people as if we were saving their lives, even with violence, '**... pulling them out of the fire**'. (Jude verse 23) Satan will not be charmed out of his possessions. We must lay siege to the souls of sinners, which are his garrison, find out where his chief strength lies, and batter it down with God's ordnance. Stay close till a breach is made, and then do not allow them under any circumstance to repair it. As we are dealing with reasonable creatures, and as they abuse their reason against the truth, we must see that our sermons are convincing. Make the light of Scripture and Reason shine so brightly in the faces of the ungodly that you will force them to see, unless they wilfully shut their eyes. A sermon full of mere words, however cleverly put together, when it lacks the light of evidence and the life of zeal, is no better than a well-dressed corpse.

In preaching, there is a communion of souls, with a communication from ours to theirs. As both we and they have understanding and will and feeling, so we must try to communicate the fullest light of evidence from our understanding to theirs, and to warm their hearts by kindling in them holy feelings which catch alight from our own. The great things we are commending to our hearers have reason enough on their side, and lie open before them in the Word of God. We are ready with all kinds of evidence to come to their understanding like a torrent, and, with our reasoning and exhortation, pour shame on all their vain objections, and beat down all before us, so that they are forced to give way to the power of truth.

If we devote ourselves with all our heart to the work of God, why do we lack in compassion for the poor unprovided congregations around us, and not take care of them by providing them with able pastors? In the meantime, go out now and then to preach to them whenever your own parish work allows. A sermon in the more out of the way places, expressly for the work of conversion, and delivered by the most lively and powerful of preachers, will be a great help in situations where there is little or no preaching.

Worldliness

Another sad discovery I have not mentioned yet concerning our service to God, is our obsession with worldly things as opposed to the interest and work of Christ. This, I will illustrate in three ways:

(1) Power-hungry pastors

I do not have any argument with those who govern us, nor am I disobedient to any of their lawful commands. But is it not a reproach on pastors that most of them, for worldly advantage, suit themselves to the party that is most likely to promote their interest. If they look for secular advantage, they suit themselves to a secular power; if for popular acclaim, they suit themselves to the Church party that is in power. This, alas, runs to epidemic proportions! In Constantine's days, there were many who were orthodox. In Constantius' days, they almost all turned Arian so that there were very few bishops who did not

apostatise and betray the truth - even some of the men who had attended the Council of Nicea. Indeed, not only Liberius, but great Ossius fell who presided over so many orthodox councils. What else do you expect from weaker men! Concerning secular advantages, how is it that all, or nearly all, pastors in the world belong either to the prevailing religion that is most consistent with their worldly interests? Among the Greeks, they are almost all Greek Orthodox; among the Papists, they are almost all Roman Catholics; in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, they are almost all Lutherans; and so it goes on in other countries. It is strange that they should be all in the right in one country, and all in the wrong in another, as if worldly advancement plays no place in men as they engage in the search of truth!

Different intellects and numerous other circumstances are bound to produce a great variety of opinions on various things. But let the prince and the men in power go one way, and you will see most of the pastors agree with them to a whisker, and that without any extraordinary search for truth! How easily did the common pastors change their religion with the king several times in the history of this land! Not all, however, as our martyrology bears witness. And the same problem is still with us today, giving opportunity for our enemies to point out that reputation and preferment are our religion and reward.

(2) Emphasis on worldly things

We put too much emphasis on worldly things, and shrink from duties that will injure or hinder our worldly interests. How common is it to see pastors submerge themselves in worldly business! Too many are exactly what the sects tell us what we are - too eager to go to the plough and labour for our living, and preaching without much study. This is a lesson easily learned. Men show no anxiety to cast off worldly care, and take up their responsibility in caring for their souls and the Church. How common it is to find those duties neglected that are most likely to reduce our estates! Are there not many, for example, who refuse to discipline their churches because it might deter the people from paying them their wages? They will not offend sinners with discipline when it is likely to damage their own estate. I find money is too a powerful argument for some men to answer; yet they are good preachers. **'For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil'** (1 Timothy 6:10), and it censors long sermons on the dangers of covetousness. I will say no more than that at present. If it was a deadly a sin for Simon Magus to offer to buy the gift of God with money (see Acts 8:18-23), what is it to sell God's gift, Christ's cause, and the souls of men, for money? Do we not fear that our money will perish with us?

(3) Money and works of charity

How barren we are of works of charity, and in using all that we have in our Master's service. If worldly interests did not prove to be so much against the interest of Christ and the Church, most pastors would be more fruitful in their good works, and bring greater glory to God. Experience shows that works of charity are the most powerful means of removing prejudice and opening hearts to the Word. When men see that you are busy doing good, they will be more disposed to believe that you are good, and that it is good to do what you preach. When they see that you love them, and seek their welfare, they will more easily trust you. And when they see that you do not seek the things of the world, they will cease suspecting your intentions and be more easily drawn to seek what you have found.

Oh, such good pastors might do if only they would set themselves wholeheartedly to do the work, and dedicate all their faculties and possessions to that end! It is not a small matter to seek the welfare of men's bodies, but that will only win them to us, and not to

God. However, it is prejudice that hinders a man's conversion, and such dedication will help us to take it away. We can do men more good when they are willing to learn from us. This is a start, and further diligent work will profit them more. I beg you, my brothers, do not think that it is ordinary charity that is expected of you, no more than ordinary piety. You must, in proportion to your talents, excel others in this respect. It is not enough to give a little to a poor man; others do the same, as you well know. But what wonderful things you could do with your estate for your Master's service! I know you cannot give away what you have not got; but I think that all that you possess should be dedicated to God. I know the great objection is: 'We have a wife and children to provide for. I can only give a little at present, for I cannot make them a family of beggars.' To this, I answer as follows:

(a) There are few texts of Scripture more abused than that of the Apostle Paul – **'But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.'** (1 Timothy 5:8) A miserly attitude towards others is just an excuse for making a personal fortune and leaving it to one's family. Actually, the apostle is speaking here against those who cast their poor relatives and family on to the Church to be maintained out of the common fund, when they are perfectly capable of looking after them themselves. For example, he might have a widow in his house that is his mother, or an unmarried daughter, and put them out to be kept by the poor fund when he has quite enough money to look after them himself. The following words show that it is present provisions and not future portions that the apostle refers to when adds - **'If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows.'** (16)

(b) You educate your children like everyone else, that they may be able to make their own way in some honest trade or employment, not needing any other provision. I know that your charity and care must begin at home, but it must not end there. You are bound to do the best you can to educate your children so that they may be useful to God, but not to leave them rich, and neither to stint on works of charity merely to leave more money for them in your will. There must be some proportion between what we set aside for the provision of our families and what we set aside for the Church of Christ. A truly charitable, self-denying heart that devotes itself and all that it has to God is the best judge of the right proportion, and will keep a close eye on expenses in order to do God a greater service.

(c) I confess that I would not wish men to be under the temptations that come with sexual abstinence for very long, lest they wound themselves and their profession by falling into sin. Now, I think it is hard for men who want to mortify the deeds of the flesh when they live in a single state, thinking that when they do not have a wife and children to support they can further their pastoral work in charitable works. If an unmarried pastor is better than a married one, I am sure that pastors should work hard to do what is best. And if an unmarried pastor can accept this state, he must try hard to accept it. This is one of the strong points of Romish policy which alleges that it is the duty of bishops, priests, and other religious orders, not to marry, because it means that they will have no children to drain off the church's revenues, nor take up their time. Unmarried priests, according to their way of thinking, are better placed to dedicate themselves to the public cause, and spend themselves in it as long as they live, and then leave all their possessions to the church when they die. It is a pity that we do not imitate them in their self-denial; but we ought to be able to make a better job of it.

(d) Those who do marry should only draw as much as is needed to maintain themselves and the family; in other words, how much could they afford to devote to the church's service. I would not expect anyone to go in want, but, in this case, flesh and blood makes even good men blind to their duties – duties which involve very grave responsibilities. If

worldly vanity did not blind us, we might know when a pressing public good cause is calling us to deny ourselves and our families. Why should we not live more cheaply in the world rather than leave the works undone that will do greater good than our plentiful provision?

Now, concerning our duties, do we consult with our family? And what counsel do they give us? They tell us that we should make sure that we have enough; and 'enough' in their eyes is only a little below the rich man's rates in the parable. (See Luke 16.19) If they are not clothed in the very best, and 'fare sumptuously' every day, they think they do not have enough.

The man who preaches an immortal crown should not seek the world's passing show. And he who preaches contempt of riches should himself disown them, and show it in his life. He who preaches self-denial and mortification should practice these virtues before the eyes of those to whom he may preach otherwise no one will accept his teaching. All Christians are sanctified; and, therefore, they, and all that they have, should be dedicated to the Master's use. But pastors are doubly sanctified: they are dedicated to God, both as Christians and as pastors. Therefore, they are doubly obliged to honour him with everything that is entrusted to them. Oh, my brothers, what an abundance of good works lie before us, and how few of them we complete! I know that the world expects more from us; but, if we cannot answer the expectations of the unreasonable, let us do what we can to answer the expectations of God, of conscience, and of all righteous men. **'For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men'**. (1 Peter 2:15) Those pastors, particularly those with larger incomes, should be enlarged in doing good. Let me give you an example. There are some pastors who draw a large annual salary, and have such extensive parishes that they are not able to do a quarter of their ministerial work. Not once a year do they see personally half the people in order to instruct them. They leave it at public preaching, as if that were all they need to do. All the rest is left undone to the everlasting danger or damnation of the majority rather than pay one or two diligent men to assist them. Or, if they have an assistant, he is some young man who is poorly qualified for the work, and who will not faithfully and diligently watch over the sheep and give them needed personal instruction. If this is not self-serving, and selling men's souls for personal gain in the world, what is? I think that such men should fear that, while they are called excellent preachers and godly pastors by men, they are called cruel soul-murderers by Christ, and the cries of those souls they neglect to eternal condemnation will ring in their ears for ever and ever.

Can preaching a good sermon ever be enough while you neglect the flock, and deny them personal help, and appropriate your income to satisfy your own flesh, which should be used to provide relief for many souls? How can you open your mouth and speak against oppression when you yourselves are great oppressors, not only of men's bodies but of their souls? How can you preach against those that are unmerciful while you are so unmerciful? And how can you condemn unfaithful pastors while you are so unfaithful? The sin is not small because it goes unobserved and is not odious in the eyes of men, or because the charity that you withhold is such that the people do not blame you for withholding it. Satan himself, the great enemy, does not need to try hard in bringing them to perdition. It is no excuse for your sin that you have the consent of your congregation, for you are acting for their eternal harm, not their eternal good.

So now, my brothers, I beg you to take what I have said into consideration. See whether or not this is a great and deplorable sin in preachers of the gospel. Ask if they are fully dedicated to God, and if they have given themselves, and all that they have, to carrying out the blessed work they have promised to do. Ask if they are following their own self-interest, an interest opposed to the things of Christ. Ask yourselves if you are not

neglecting your duty by serving God only in the cheapest and most applauded part of his work, and withdrawing from what is costly and painful? Our answers to these questions will show that too many of us are earth-bound even when we seem to be heavenly. They reveal that our minds are set on things below while we preach of things above, and idolise the world while we call on men to deny it. (Colossians 3:2) As Salvian says - 'No one neglects salvation more than the one who prefers something above God.' Despisers of God prove to be despisers of their own salvation.

Peace and unity in the Church

Sadly, we are also guilty of undervaluing the unity and peace of the whole Christian Church. Though I hardly meet anyone who is against unity and peace, or, at least, speaks out against it, it is rare to find someone who actively promotes it. Too often, we find men who are averse to it, and are jealous of it because they are the instruments of division. The Papists have so long abused the name 'catholic' with regard to the Church that, in opposition to them, many of our pastors have either cut it out of their creeds, or obscured the meaning of the name so that few understand or consider the nature of the thing. They think it is enough to believe that there is a body, though they hardly behave like members of it. If the Papists idolise the Church, should we, therefore, deny it, disregard it, or divide it?

It is a great and prevailing sin throughout the Christian world to express their faith by joining a faction. Instead of showing love and tender care for the Church universal, they confine their love and respect to one party. Now, we should jealously guard the purer parts of the church against the impure, and refuse to participate with anyone in his sins. Yet the most infirm and diseased part of the church should be made an object of our compassion and aid to the utmost of our powers. Christian fellowship should be maintained as far as it is possible, and nowhere avoided without good reason. We must love those of our neighbourhood that have an infectious condition, and try to give them as much relief as possible, acknowledging them as fellow human beings, even if we cannot physically meet with them. For others, who have diseases that are not so infectious, we can do more than provide aid, for how much they need it!

Of the many who say that they belong to the 'catholic' Church, it is rare to meet anyone with a catholic spirit. Few show a universal consideration and regard for the whole Church, but look at their own denomination as if it were the whole. There are some called Lutherans, some called Calvinists, and some belonging to other denominations, when most of them will pray hard only for the prosperity of their denomination, and rejoice and give thanks when all goes well with them. But if another denomination suffers, they take no notice, as if it were no loss at all to the Church. They treat their denomination, even if it is only small, as if all goes well with the Church when it goes well with them. We cry down the Pope as Antichrist for declaring that the true Church is the Roman Catholic Church - without doubt, it is abominable schism - but, alas, how many echo this attitude, even while they rebuke it! And as the Papists foist the word 'Roman' into their creed, and turn the Catholic Church into the Roman Catholic Church - as if there were no other Catholics, and the Church is no larger - so is it with many others sheltering in their various denominations. Some regard it as the Lutheran 'catholic' church, and some the Reformed 'catholic' church, and some the Baptist 'catholic' church, and so on. And if they do not differ among themselves, they are little troubled when they differ with other Christians in other denominations. The peace of their denomination they take for the peace of the Church. No wonder they are so self-satisfied!

How rare is it to meet a pastor who hurts and bleeds with the Church's wounds, and takes them to heart as his own, or even thinks of a cure! Few, indeed! But almost every

denomination thinks that the happiness of the rest consists in joining them! And, because they are not of their mind, they cry, 'Down with them!' How glad they are when they hear of their downfall, thinking that some benefit will come to them in some way. How few there are who understand the true differences between the denominations, or ever judge wisely how many are just verbal, and how many are real! And if a few do understand, and tell others, they are taken to be in error, and charged with tolerating the sins of the other denominations!

Some pastors grow zealous for peace as they grow older and develop a greater experience of men's spirits and principles, and see clearly the true state of the churches, and the many differences between them. And then they write their 'Irenicons' [proposals for securing peace]; and many of them are still with us to this day. Just as young men, in the heat of their passion, are judged to be unfit as students of moral philosophy, so we find that these same young men, who grow zealous for peace and unity as they grow older, were once fanatical for their denominations in their young days. Such peace makers as these seldom do much good, other than quieting their own consciences after having neglected so great a duty. Now they try to moderate the behaviour of a few hotheads, saving themselves from further guilt, and leaving behind after their death a witness against a wilful, self-conceited world in which there is no peace. Indeed, a passion for unity often brings with it the charge that a pastor is tolerating some heresy or other. Do people really think no zeal is necessary for propagating the great fundamental truths of the Church's unity and peace, except for certain denominations and some particular truths!

The devil takes advantage of these things by employing them as his agents. The unhappy Socinians [followers of Faustus and Laelius Socinus, who flourished about 1635–45, who rejected a number of orthodox Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and original sin] write many books on catholic and arch-catholic unity and peace; but they only do it for their own ends. It is the work of the enemy of peace, whenever someone pleads for peace, to bring him under suspicion of making his plea to cover up his own errors. It is a fearful case when heresy is credited to someone who is a friend of unity and peace in the Church. It is a scandal that so great and necessary a duty, upon which the Church's welfare depends, should be brought under suspicion or into disgrace! My brothers, I am saying these things for a very good reason. We have in England, perhaps more than any other nation, many unhappy divisions. We also have many godly pastors. Most of the divisions revolve around small matters such as the right form and order of Church government. Is the distance so great that Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Independents cannot come together and agree on greater matters? If they had the will, and a heartfelt longing for peace, they might. I know that they might. I have spoken with moderate men of all parties, and I see that, with some concessions, it is an easy work.

If only men's hearts were sensitive to the needs of the Church, and were sincerely touched with love for one another! If they set out with a sincere heart, the settling of a safe and happy peace in the Church would be an easy work. If we cannot agree at every point, we could easily narrow down our differences, and base our fellowship on foundational and biblical things where we find agreement. We can be sure to determine the safest way of managing our few and small disagreements without endangering or troubling the Church. But is unity pursued? Certainly not! To our shame, it is not achieved. Let each denomination flatter itself as much as it pleases, but it will be recorded, to the disgrace of the ministry in England, and, as long as the gospel remains in the world, that unity is rarely found.

Oh, what terrible things come through the sin of disunity! Not since the days of the apostles, I think, was there ever a greater show of godliness. Most of us are bound by solemn oath and covenant to seek unity and reformation. We all confess the worth of

peace, and most preach it and talk about it; yet we sit still and neglect it, as if it were not worth looking for. We read and preach on texts that command us to **'follow peace with all men'** (Hebrews 12:14), and **'If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.'** (Romans 12:18) Yet we are far from following these exhortations, and doing all we can to promote peace in the Church. Many scoff at it, and malign and criticise those who are trying to promote it, as if a zeal for peace were the result of a decline in holiness! It is as if holiness and peace have so far fallen out that there is no way of reconciling them. Yet we know by long experience that unity is a sure friend of piety, and piety always brings unity; while on the other hand errors and heresies are the offspring of disunity, and disunity breeds and feeds on error. We have seen to our sorrow that the servants of the Lord do not dwell together in unity with one heart and one soul and one mind. Neither do they promote one another's faith and holiness, nor encourage and aid one another in the fight against sin, nor rejoice together in the hope of future glory.

On the contrary, they behave jealously to one another, drown holy love with bitter arguments, study how to disgrace and undermine one another, and increase our own denominational interests, whether our denomination is right or wrong! We, who should glory in our love for our brothers as a mark of our sincerity in the faith, have turned it into a love for denominations; and those who are against our denomination are the targets of our venom and envy and malice than our love. I know this is not so in every case, nor is it prevalent in every true believer; but it is so common that it causes us to question the sincerity of many who have the reputation for being godly. And it is not us only who have been burnt by this flame. We have drawn our people into it, and cherished them in it, so that most believers in our nation are divided by denominationalism, and direct most of their zeal into stupid prejudices, and disputes, and envying, and animosity.

Indeed, it is the mark of a graceless sinner to mock the godly; but now, how few they are who do not secretly mock and slander those that are not of their opinion! A pious Episcopalian will scorn and slander a Presbyterian, a Presbyterian an Independent, and an Independent both of them. And, what is worse, the common, ignorant people take note, and not only mock us, but become hardened by our example against the faith. When we go to persuade them to become Christians, they see so many denominations, and do not know which one to join. They conclude that it is good to refuse all of them since they are uncertain which is the right one judging by their behaviour and disunity. Thus, thousands hold Christianity in contempt because of our divisions; and many poor worldly people think they are better off sticking to their old ways when they see in us nothing but division. I know that some of our men are scholars, and do intend to harm any of the unconverted. Certainly, the hardening of men in their ignorance is not part of their purpose. Nevertheless, this is what happens. To mean well and yet do evil is no rare thing. Yet who can, with all respect to any man on earth, sit still and hold his tongue while he sees people running to their own destruction, and witness the souls of men undone by the disputes of theologians from the different denominations?

The Lord knows my heart, and he also knows that I am not party to one of these disputes; so I do not speak a word against one party or another. Neither do I have a strong argument with any of them. But if I did, my conscience would trouble me, and I would remain silent for fear of giving some offence to those I should honour with the gospel. For what am I but a servant of Christ? And what is my life worth unless I render him service? Whose favour will reward me for the ruin of the Church? And who can remain silent while souls are left undone? Certainly not me, while God is my Master, his Word my rule, his work my business, and the success of it in the saving of souls my end? Who can be reconciled to what so sadly contradicts his Master's interest and his main purpose in life? Nor would I have said any of this had it been only in respect to my own charge where,

praise God, the wound is only small compared with what can be observed in other places.

But my knowledge of some neighbouring congregations, and of others more remote, has provoked me to make these observations. We can talk of peace as long as we have breath, but we will never obtain it until we return to the simplicity of the apostolic age. The Papist's faith is too diverse for everyone to agree with and even to their own people they insist on enforcing it with threats. Yet many anti-papists do very much the same thing with long, tedious expositions of their subscribed confessions and their threatening penalties, succeeding only in taking the heart out of their members by the harsh discipline imposed. When once we return to the ancient simplicity of faith, then, and not until then, shall we return to ancient love and peace. I would, therefore, recommend to all my brothers, as the most needed thing for the Church's peace, to unite in the great truths, and tolerate one another in secondary matters. Do not write large creeds that contain more 'truths' than God has revealed. To this end, let me beg you to take care in the following matters:

(1) Do not put too great an emphasis on controversial opinions that divide godly men, and split whole churches.

(2) Do not put too great an emphasis on those controversies that fall ultimately into philosophical uncertainties, such as unprofitable disputes about freewill, the way the Spirit operates, and the Divine decrees.

(3) Do not stress those controversies that are merely verbal, and which, if they were analysed, would be seen as something about nothing. Of these, there are a great many (I speak about this from personal knowledge), and they make a great noise in the world, but they tear apart the Church more than their eager defenders seem to realise.

(4) Do not put an emphasis on any novel teaching that has either been disowned by the Church, or is unknown by the Church of Christ in any age since the Scriptures were delivered to us.

(5) Even more, do not put a strong emphasis on things that more prudent ages knew nothing about.

(6) Let us deny strongly any point that since the age of the apostles has been refused and refuted. I know it is said that a man may subscribe to the Scriptures and the ancient creeds, and still maintain Socinianism, or some other heresies. To this, I reply, 'He may fail the test that your own minds have thought up; but while you make a snare to catch heretics instead of forwarding the Church's fellowship, you will miss your mark. The heretic, with his slippery conscience, may prevail, but you, and young Christians, without training and role models, may possibly be ensnared. You can be sure that unless you keep close to the words of Scripture, any new creed of the Church is likely to cause new divisions.

Oh, that we may live in happier times, when God will heal his broken churches! Then you will see that all I am pleading for will come about, moderation will take the place of division, and the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture will be widely held. Let us see men's confessions of faith and commentaries as of value only as secondary helps, and not made the test of Church communion, because they are secondary to Scripture. However, until the healing age comes, we cannot expect healing truths to be popular, because there is little healing spirit in the leaders of the Church. But when the work is ready, God will provide the workmen to do it; and blessed will be the agents of so glorious a work!

Church discipline

Lastly, we are sadly neglecting the performance of recognised spiritual duties; for example, church discipline. If any work of reformation is to be done, it will not get any further forward than those that are drawn to do it. If only there were more to do it! And when a work is likely to prove difficult and costly, how backward we are in taking it up, and how many excuses we put forward to avoid doing it! What subject has been more talked about, and prayed for, and argued about, in England for many years, than discipline? In point of fact, it is only a few men who seem inclined to dispute on one side or other - some for the Episcopal way, some for the Presbyterian way, and some for the Congregational way. Yet, when it comes to the practice of discipline, for all I know, everyone is agreed in ignoring it. It makes me wonder sometimes how many congregations in our land have ever exercised discipline. Very few, I suspect. So many books have been written on the subject, you would think that our whole national ministry has taken it up. How zealously they contend for it, and make many criticisms against its opponents. Yet, notwithstanding all this, they do little or nothing to forward it. I marvel at what makes them so zealous in siding for what their practice shows their hearts are against! But I see that a disputing passion is more prevalent than a holy, obedient, practical zeal.

How many pastors are there in England who do not know their own parish and cannot tell its true members? They never cast out even one obstinate sinner, nor bring one to public confession with a promise of reformation, nor even admonish one publicly in order to call him to repentance! But they think they are doing their duty if they refuse them the Lord's Supper (which the erring member avoids coming to anyway). In the meanwhile, they leave them still as members of the church (for church membership does not consist merely in partaking of the Lord's Supper), and do not issue a call for personal repentance for their sin. Is it not God's command that they should be personally rebuked and admonished, and publicly called to repentance, and be cast out if they remain impenitent? If these are not our duties, why do we make such a fuss about them in the world? If they are our duties, why do we not practice them? Many pastors avoid reading the Word on these points. The ancient discipline of the Church was stricter. The Sixth General Council at Constantinople (678) ordered that whosoever was three days absent from church without excuse was to be excommunicated.

Brothers, I have no intention of offending any party, but I must say this, that these sins should not be covered up with excuses or denials. We have long cried for discipline, and every denomination has its own special procedures. Do you want people to value your form of government or not? No doubt you do. Now, if you want people to value it, it must have something good in it; so show them something good. And if you want people to believe you, show it to them not only on paper but in practice, not simply in words but in deeds. How can people know the worth of discipline when you do not practise it? Is it a name or a shadow that you making all this fuss about? How can they think of something good when you do not do the right thing? Truly, I fear that we do not do the right things in order to uphold our cause. Indeed, we betray it as we neglect it. Speak the truth, then. Is it for the things concerning discipline that we get a good reputation? Do those pastors who practise discipline get a good reputation because they stand for it, and a bad reputation with the ungodly when they do not practise it. Then they find the church toothless, and not as fierce towards to them as they expected. If the strength of our church government comes to depend on the votes of those who should be corrected or put out, and if the worst of men become its friends because it refuses to act against them in their ungodliness, we will then see the anger the Lord as he reveals his wrath against us.

Put all cases of discipline together that were exercised in our county ever since people started calling for it, and I doubt you will find many godly people who like its effects. Can

you wonder that the many that look for deeds and not words, reformation rather than speeches about reformation, should desert the State Church and go to the Independent churches instead! Christians value God's ordinances, and do not consider them a waste of time. Therefore, they are unwilling to live without them. Discipline is not an option for the Church; we need to maintain a difference between the precious and the vile. If we do not exercise discipline, the godly will desert us by separating themselves from us. Do you not keep on your church roll many who are notoriously ignorant, and utterly destitute of religion, and never publicly (or privately) reprove them, or call them to repentance, or cast them out? Then, do not marvel if some timid souls run out of your churches as if from a crumbling building for fear that it will soon fall on their heads. Consider this, I beg you. If you treated timid Christians in the sacrament as you do with discipline, and only show them the bread and wine, and never let them taste of these memorials of their Redeemer's love, will the name of the sacrament be sufficient for them? No; they want to participate in your communion? So why should you think that they will be satisfied with the empty sound of an undisciplined church government?

Besides this, consider what harm you bring to your own cause when you enter into disputes with men of different views. If your principles are shown to be better than theirs, yet their practice is better, then the people will reject you because they only hear your words, and see no action so far as discipline is concerned. Now I am not attacking your church government; I am for it. I tell you that it is you who are against discipline though you seem so earnest in arguing for it. You bring more disgrace on it for lack of action than all your commendations of it through argument. And you will find, before you have done, that a faithful exercise of it will be your strongest argument. Till then, the people will take you to be proclaiming, 'We will have no public admonitions, no confessions, nor excommunications. Our way is to do nothing, and to have Church government only in name. I do not want to make you fanatics of church discipline at this time, but when will it ever be the right time? Have you set aside certain sermons and actions these many years on the excuse that the time is not yet ready for them? Will there be a better time for them when you are dead? How many have died already before you embark on this important work, though many are long prepared for it! I know that some of you experience more discouragements and hindrances than others, but what discouragements and hindrances can be an excuse from not doing your duty?

Added to the reasons I have already stated, let these extra ones be considered seriously:

(1) How sad it is when we make it good preaching practice to avoid living in the wilful omission of any known duty and yet avoid enforcing discipline! And so it goes on, year after year, indeed, all our days! If excuses are danger signs, there is no man better at finding them than you.

(2) I am speaking here of laziness and apathy, perhaps unfaithfulness, in the work of Christ. I am also speaking from experience. It was laziness that kept me so long from duty, and I pleaded hard against it. It is indeed a troublesome and painful work that calls for self-denial because we know that it will bring down the displeasure of the wicked on our heads. Yet dare we put worldly ease and quietness, and the love and peacefulness of wicked men, before our service to Christ our Master? Can lazy servants expect a rich reward? (See the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14:30) Remember, dear brothers, that in this county we made this promise before God in the second article of our agreement:

'We agree and resolve, by God's help, that so far as God makes known our duty to us, we will faithfully endeavour to discharge it, and will not desist through any fears or losses in our estates, or the frowns and displeasure of men, or any of the like carnal

inducements whatsoever.'

I beg you, then, study this promise, and compare your performance with it. And do not imagine that you were trapped into making such a promise, for God's law laid an obligation on you to perform the very same duty even before you were ordained. Here is something that other Christians must do as well as you.

(3) Neglecting discipline has a strong tendency to delude immortal souls into thinking that they are Christians when they are not, for it permits them to live with a good character and appear at the sacraments. It can also make the scandalous think that their sins can be tolerated because the pastors of the church tolerate them.

(4) We corrupt Christianity itself in the eyes of the world, and play a part in making people believe that Christ is no more for holiness than Satan, or that the Christian faith no longer requires holiness any more than other religions in the world. For if the holy and unholy are both permitted as sheep in the same fold, without any attempt to separate them, we defame the Redeemer, as if he were guilty of tolerating lack of morals in the very nature of his precepts.

(5) We are sending our people to the Independents by permitting the worst to go un-reproved in our churches; so much so, so that many sincere Christians think that they must withdraw from us. I have spoken with some members of the Independent churches who are moderate men, and have argued with them against separation. They assure me that they were once Episcopalians or Presbyterian, and have no arguments against those forms of government, but they joined other churches out of necessity, thinking that discipline, being an ordinance of Christ, should be enforced. Therefore, they dared not stay in any church where it is not exercised. They could not find any Episcopalian or Presbyterian churches that enforced discipline (this is what they told me), so they separated themselves until the time that the churches returned to exercising discipline. When this is put right, they said, they promise to return. I confess that I was sad that these brothers had to withdraw from us. There is no excuse for not excluding wilful sinners from the sacrament, as part of the disciplining of the members of our churches.

(6) It is our own fault if we bring the wrath of God upon our heads, and upon the heads of those who belong to our congregations, thus withering the fruit of our labours. If the angel of the church of Thyatira was reproved for allowing seducers into the church (see Revelation 2:20-23), we too should be reproved for the same thing by allowing open, scandalous, impenitent sinners to remain.

Now, what are the hindrances that at present keep the pastors of England from exercising that discipline for which they have so long pleaded? The main reason, as far as I can tell, is the difficulty of the work, and the suffering they are likely to incur through it. When we publicly reprove a sinner, he will rage at it, and act against us with deadly malice. We can induce very few to make a sincere public profession of true repentance. If we go on to excommunicate them, they are outraged. If we should deal, as God requires us to do, with all the obstinate sinners in the parish, there would be no living among them! We would be so hated that our lives would become uncomfortable and our labours would become unprofitable, for sinners will not listen to us when they vent their hatred against us. Therefore, duty ceases to be duty to us because the harm that will follow will be greater than the good.

These, then, are the main reasons for not enforcing discipline, and, I add to that, the great labour that private admonition of each offender would cost us. Now, to all of this I respond:

(a) Are not these reasons as valid against Christianity itself, especially in some periods of history, as they are against discipline? Christ did not come to bring peace on the earth. (Matthew 10:34) We have his peace, but it is not from the world, for he told us that the world would hate us. (John 15:18) Might not John Bradford, or Bishop Hooper, or any of the martyrs who were burnt to death in Queen Mary's day, rise up as witnesses against us when we set aside the cost of owning the Reformation? Might they not say, 'It made us hated, and exposed our very lives to the flames'? The one who does not hate all that he has, even his very life, for Christ, will hear at the end, 'I never knew you.' (Matthew 7:21-23) Yet we take the risk of worldly loss as a reason for not doing his work! What is it but hypocrisy to shrink from suffering, and to take up only safe and easy work, and think that the rest of the responsibilities have nothing to do with us? Indeed, this is a common way of escaping suffering, by neglecting the responsibilities that would expose us to it. If we did our duty faithfully, we pastors would find ourselves in the same position as our Christian predecessors did among the pagans and other unbelievers. But if you do not mean to suffer for Christ, why did you put your hand to his plough? (Luke 9:62) Why did you not first sit down and count the cost? (See Luke 14:28) This means that ministerial work is done so unfaithfully because it is undertaken in a worldly spirit. Men see the ministry as a life of ease and honour and respectability, and are determined to use it for their own ends. They do not expect hatred and suffering, and so avoid these things by shunning discipline.

(b) As for the excuse that if we enforce discipline we will reduce our ability to do good, I answer that we will be as hated by wicked men for our preaching and reproof as any other duty. You can be sure that God brings good out of his own ordinances and blesses them, or else he would not have appointed them. If you publicly rebuke scandalous sinners, and call them to repentance, and cast out the obstinate, you may do them some good, even those you excommunicate. At least I am sure that excommunication is God's means; and it is his last resort when reproofs prove ineffective. It is therefore perverse to neglect this last procedure lest we frustrate all the previous procedures. Do we suppose that the final procedure should not be employed because the former procedures did no good? However, the regular members will benefit even if the offender does not. God will receive the honour when his Church is shown to be different from the world, otherwise the heirs of heaven and hell will be all mixed up, and the world will think that Christ and Satan are battling in vain when both have the same toleration of sin.

(c) But let me tell you this: the difficulties on the way are not as great, nor is discipline such a useless thing, as you might imagine. I praise God for the small and recent test I set; so I am speaking from experience. Exercising discipline is not a vain exercise, nor the risks large enough to excuse our neglect. I confess that, if I had my way, pastors would be ejected if they can be found to be negligent; for they will not rule their people with discipline. The same can be said of negligent preachers. In my view, ruling is as essential a part of the pastor's office as preaching. I go no further in these confessions.

And now, my brothers, what remains for us but to declare ourselves guilty of these sins, and humble our souls before the Lord? Is this fulfilling the apostle's command, '**... take heed to yourselves and to all the flock**'? (Acts 20:28) Is this the pattern laid down in this verse? If we remain hard-hearted and unhumiliated, how sad a symptom it is of spiritual decline in ourselves and in the Church! The ministry has often been under threat, and maligned by many kinds of enemies; and, though this may expose their ungodly malice, it may also indicate to us something of God's just indignation. Believe me, brothers, the ministry of England has committed not the least, nor the last, of the sins of the land. It is time, then, for us to humble ourselves for our sins – exactly what we have been asking our people to do for a long time. If we had our wits about us, we would see that God is offended at us, and that his voice calling our nation to repentance is speaking to us as well. '**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**'

(Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) By fire and sword, God calls us to humiliation. **‘For the time has come for judgement to begin at the house of God’**. (1 Peter 4:17) So if humiliation cannot be found, it will be a sad day for our land.

What! Shall we deny or excuse the very sins in us that we find in our people? Would it not be better to give glory to God in personal confession than to cover our sins with fig leaves? Concerning the glory that we have denied to God, let him build his glory on the ruins of our lives, because we have put our interests before his. Alas! If you left God to get his own honour, he will have it, but to your everlasting sorrow and dishonour. Sins openly committed bring less honour to us when we cover them up than when we confess them. It is our sins that bring us dishonour, and not our confession of them. We committed them before the sun, so we cannot hide them; and all attempts to cover them up only increase our guilt and shame. There is no way to repair the breaches in our honour that our sins have made except by free confession and humiliation. I dare to make confession of my own sins: and if any are offended that I have confessed theirs, I tell them that I am doing to them only what I have done to myself. And if they refuse to confess their sin, they do so at their peril. But as for all the truly humble pastors of Christ, I do not doubt that they will make a solemn confession of their sins before their congregations, and promise a reformation in their lives.

SECTION 2

THE DUTY OF PERSONALLY CATECHISING AND INSTRUCTING THE FLOCK

Having exposed and lamented our sins and neglect of our pastoral duty, God forbid that we should go on treating our sins as carelessly as we did before! Leaving these things, then, I will now go on to encourage you to faithfully discharge a great duty - namely, that of personal catechising and instructing everyone in your parish or congregation.

Firstly, I will provide you with some motives for performing this duty.

Secondly, I will answer some objections to this duty.

Thirdly, I will give you some instruction on the performance of this duty.

PART I

MOTIVES FOR THIS DUTY OF SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING

It is now my pleasant duty to give you some motives for performing this spiritual duty. The first reason by which I hope to persuade you to take up this duty is taken from its benefits, the second is from its difficulty, and the third is from its necessity, and the many responsibilities that fall upon us.

ARTICLE 1

MOTIVES FROM THE BENEFITS OF THE WORK

When I look into the future, and judge what will happen when the work is well done, and all the blessings of God that will result, it makes my heart leap for joy. Truly, my brothers, you have begun a most wonderful work, and something your conscience can rejoice in together with your parish, your nation, and children yet unborn. Yes, thousands and millions, for all we know, will have cause to bless God for it when we come to the end of our course. And although it is our business just now to humble ourselves for neglecting the work so long, yet the hope of success is so great in us that we are ready to turn this occasion into a day of rejoicing.

I praise the Lord that I have lived to see such a day as this, and to be present at such a solemn conference of so many servants of Christ! I praise the Lord who has honoured you - the pastors of this county - to be the beginners and awakeners of the nation in doing your duty. Spiritual counselling is not a controversial point that the high minds of men could pick a quarrel with, nor is it a new invention inviting a jealous charge of innovation. No, it is a well-known responsibility, just a way of managing ministerial work in a more effective way. It is not a new invention, but simply a restoration of the old ministerial work. And because it is so full of advantages for the Church, I will now name you a number of special benefits that, I hope, will result from it. When you see how excellent it is, you will be all the more keen to follow it up, and more loath, through any neglect or failure on your part, to hinder or destroy it. Certainly, whoever has a true intention of being a minister of Christ will rejoice in the appearance of anything that helps him fulfil his ministry; and nothing is more welcome than something that enriches further the very business of his life. The work of counselling is calculated to accomplish this, as I will prove.

The importance of personal work

It is a wonderful method of converting souls, for it brings together many things that further this end.

(1) As to why it should be done: it deals with necessary things, the very principles or essentials of the Christian faith.

(2) As to how it is best done: it should take place privately when we have the opportunity of touching minds and hearts. The work of conversion consists of two things: *firstly*, informing the mind of the essential principles of the faith; and *secondly*, seeking a change of the will under the influence of the truth. Now, in this work we have the opportunity to achieve both objectives. For the informing of the understanding, it is a good help to fix a summary of Christianity doctrine in their memory. It is true that words learnt but not understood make no change in the life, yet, when the words are explained in plain English, the person being instructed is more likely to grasp the meaning and truth of the matter under discussion. What do we have to make understandable things that are invisible but words or signs?

Those, then, that scoff at all catechisms as unprofitable exercises, should scoff at themselves for talking, and using words to open their minds to others. Why not, then, use written words, which are committed to their memories, to instruct, as well as the passing words of preachers? This '**form of sound words**' (2 Timothy 1:13) is not nearly as unprofitable as some people imagine, but is useful for all. Besides, we have the opportunity during a personal interview to see how far they understand the catechism, and to explain it to them as we go along. We may emphasise those things that most need to be known. These two together will produce this 'form of sound words' which, with biblical exposition, will do more than either of them could do alone.

Moreover, we will have the best opportunity to impress the truth on their hearts when we address each individual's particular need, and declare, '**You are the man**'. (2 Samuel 2:7) Then we can drive home the truth with special force. If anything in the world is likely to do them good, it is this. They will appreciate a personal talk even when they do not understand a sermon. This talk will be of great help in applying the truth to their lives. Besides, you will hear their objections, and know where it is that Satan has got hold of them, and so be able to show them their errors, answer their objections, and convince them effectively. We can more easily bring them to the point, and urge them to do better in the future, and promise to show them the means of reformation. What more proof do we need that this is the right method than our own experience? I seldom meet with men in private who do not go away without some sense of conviction, and a promise of new obedience, possibly even a deeper repentance of sin.

Oh, my brothers, what a blow we could give to the kingdom of darkness by the faithful and skilful management of this work! If, then, the saving of the souls of your neighbours – and of many souls - from everlasting misery is worth the labour, be up and doing, and apply yourself to this blessed work! If it will do your heart good to see your converts among the saints in glory, praising the Lamb before the throne. Now, if it would rejoice your heart to present them blameless and spotless to Christ, then prosecute with diligence and zeal this marvellous opportunity being offered you. If you are true pastors of Christ, you will long for the perfecting of his body and the gathering in of his elect. And you will '**labour in birth until Christ in formed**' in the souls of your people. (Galatians 4:19) You will take such opportunities as your harvest-time affords, and busy in the sunshine days of a rainy

harvest. There is no excuse to be idle. If you have a spark of Christian compassion in you, it will be worth your utmost labour knowing that **'he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.'** (James 5:20)

If, then, you are indeed fellow-workers with Christ, put your hands to his work, and do not neglect the souls for whom he died. Oh, remember, that when you are talking with the unconverted, you have an opportunity to save a soul and cause the angels of heaven, and even Christ himself, to rejoice, for you have cast Satan out of a sinner and increased the family of God! **'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?'** (1 Thessalonians 2:19) Is it not our saved people **'in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming'**? Indeed it is! Without doubt, they will be your glory and your joy!

Personal work builds up the converted

Counselling work promotes and builds up those who are converted, and establishes them in the faith. You risk the whole work, or at least hinder it, if you do not proceed in the right order. How can you build if you do not first put in a good foundation; or how can you put up the top-stone while the middle parts are neglected? Grace makes no leaps, any more than nature. The second order of Christian truth is dependent on the first, and can never be properly learnt until the first are mastered. This will make us labour in vain, for they will be **'always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.'** (2 Timothy 3:7) They are trying to read before they can spell without knowing the letters of the alphabet! This causes many to fall away. They are shaken with every wind of temptation because they are not well settled in the fundamental truths of the faith. It is these fundamentals that lead them on to further truths; and it is these truths they must base everything on. From these truths, flow all their graces and all their duties. They are well able to fortify them against temptations. He who does not know them knows nothing. He who knows them well knows everything that is needed to make him happy. He who knows them best, is the brightest and most understanding of believers. The godliest people in your congregation will find it worthwhile to learn by heart the words of a catechism. If you want to edify them, and firmly establish them in the faith, work hard at this duty.

Personal work adds to public preaching

Personal work makes your public preaching better understood and respected. When you have instructed them in the principles, they will understand you better. They will see what you getting at when you teach them the main points. This prepares their minds, and opens a way to their hearts. Without this work, you may lose the fruit of your labour. The less effort you make in personal work, the less good you will do. Therefore, as you do not want to waste your public work, see that you are faithful in this private work.

Personal work brings knowledge of your people

By means of personal counselling, you will come to know your people very well, and will win their affection. Failure to do this work – and this applies to those who have very large congregations - is a great hindrance to the success of your labours. By being distant and unapproachable, many misunderstandings between pastors and people come about; while, on the other hand, familiarity tends to draw out those affections that will open their minds to further instruction. Besides, when we are open with them, they will feel able to bring their doubts to us, and speak freely with us. But when a minister does not know his people well, or acts as if he did not really know them at all, this is a great hindrance to the

quality of his work.

Personal work is a spiritual work

By means of personal work, we come to know each person's spiritual state, and so are able know how best to watch over them. We will know what to preach to them and say to them when we know their spiritual needs and problems, and so declare what they most need to hear. We will know how to be jealous over them **'with godly jealousy'** (2 Corinthians 11:2), and tell them what temptations to guard against. We will know how to weep with them and rejoice with them and pray for them. For just as the pastor who prays for himself will know his own needs and the diseases of his own heart, so the pastor who prays for others will know their needs as far as it is possible.

Personal work reveals spiritual need

By personal work, we come to know our people's spiritual state, and will be better placed to admit them to the sacraments. Though I do not doubt that a pastor is delighted when his people come to him at any time to tell him of their faith and spiritual growth, and receive instruction, this time can be useful in preparing for the Lord's Supper. Yet because pastors consider their members fit to receive the Communion just on a casual observation of each member of their flock, and not on their willingness to submit to guidance and instruction, this has led the people to ignore and object to personal examination. Now, by using this method, we will discover how fit or unfit they are in a way they will not object to, and in a manner far more effective than by some casual examination before they are admitted to the Lord's table.

Personal work is part of the pastoral office

Counselling work shows us the true nature of the pastoral office, and awakens us to a better attitude towards it. It is all too common for our people to think that the work of the ministry is just preaching and baptising and administering the Lord's Supper and visiting the sick. But now they will be happy to become more involved. Too many pastors are so distant that the people refuse to do anything. It has often grieved my heart to see some eminent preachers do little in the way of saving souls except in the pulpit. Their work does little good through their neglect. There are hundreds of people who have never spoken to us personally about their salvation, which we judge they do not consider their duty. Nothing hardens a man so much as the neglect of personal work. There are so few that have taken it up, and this omission has grown so common among pastors that the disgrace of it overshadows their ability. Indeed, the guilt of it is no longer regarded as a mark of dishonour. Never does sin so reign in the Church or State as when pastors get the reputation for not speaking personally to sinners. But I have no doubt, that, through the mercy of God, the restoration of the practice of personal oversight will convince pastors that this is as much their kind of work as preaching.

My brothers, be careful to do this work, and do it well. You live quietly, with never a word of rebuke to those who are negligent; but I live in hope that most of you present today will live to see the time when the neglect of private personal work in the flock will be considered a scandal and a sin. It will be thought of as disgraceful to those who are guilty of it as casual preaching was in former times. A schoolmaster must take a personal account of his scholars, or else he is not likely to do any good. If physicians only attend a few public lectures on medicine, or read a few books or magazines, their patients will get no benefit. Neither will a lawyer deal better with your estate by reading a few books on law. Now, the charge of a pastor includes personal counselling, as well as everything else. Let us show the world that this practice is important, for most men have grown tired of

words and look for actions.

The truth of the matter is that we have been led into error in this respect by over-reacting to the example of the Papists who practice auricular confession [confession of sins out loud in the hearing of a priest]. In overthrowing this error, we have gone to the opposite extreme and led our people into another error. It troubles me much to read in a book by an orthodox historian that sexual lust led many in avoiding the strict inquiries of the priests in the confession, and this led them to support the Reformation in Germany. Yet there may be some truth in it because many, who were against the Reformation in some respects, joined with better men in denouncing the Roman clergy. I have no doubt that auricular confession is a sinful novelty that was unknown in the early Church, but perhaps some will think it strange when I say that our neglect of personal work is a sin worse than the Roman doctrines of salvation and purgatory. If any among us is guilty of thinking that, when he has preached, he has finished his work, let us show him, by our example, that there is so much more to be done. **'Taking heed to all the flock'** is a greater task than most lazy pastors imagine. When once a pastor thinks that any duty is no duty at all, he will neglect it, and be unrepentant at its neglect.

Personal work brings a greater commitment

Personal work will help our people understand the nature of their responsibilities with regard to their overseers, and, consequently, fulfil them better. This would be of no consequence if it were for our sakes only, but our people's salvation is involved here. I am convinced by sad experience that it is a great hindrance to their salvation, and to a true reformation of the Church, when our people do not understand what the work of a minister is, and what their responsibilities are towards him. They think that a minister has nothing more to do but to preach to them, administer the sacraments, and visit them in sickness; and that if they listen to him, and receive the sacraments from him, they owe him nothing more. Little do they know that the minister is in the church like a schoolteacher at school, teaching and taking note of the progress of every one of his students. All Christians are disciples or students in the school of faith. It does not occur to them that a minister in his church is like a doctor in a town, making himself available to all people to go and ask for personal advice. The pastor's lips should issue knowledge, and the people should expect the law from his mouth because he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. They have no idea that all souls in the congregation must, for their own safety, come to him for the resolving of their doubts, for help with their sins, for direction in duty, and the increase of their knowledge in all saving grace. Pastors are specifically called by their congregations for this purpose - to be ready to advise and help the flock.

If our people knew what to do, they would readily come to us whenever they desired instruction, and to give an account of their knowledge, faith, and life. And they would come entirely of their own accord, knock more often at our doors, call for help for their souls, and ask, **'What must I do to be saved?'** (Acts 16:30) Whereas now, sadly, they think a minister has little to do with them; and if he reproves them, or calls them to be catechised and instructed, or if he wishes to take stock of their faith and progress, they ask him by what authority he does these things? They consider him to be a busybody who loves to be meddling in things that do not concern him because he has nothing else to do. Or, perhaps he is a proud fellow who loves to rule over the consciences of his people. They might as well ask by what authority he preaches or prays or administers the sacrament to them! They do not think that all our authority is in our work.

We were ordained to do our duty; and our work is for them, and for their good. Who would quarrel with a man who has come to put out a fire in the house, and ask him by what authority he does it? Or someone who comes with money for the poor, and ask by what

authority he is taking up money! Or, as if I offered my hand to someone who has fallen down to help him up, or to someone who has fallen into the water to save him from drowning, and they ask me by what authority I am doing it? What is it that brought our people to an ignorance of our responsibilities? To speak the truth, it is we, brothers, who are to blame, for we have accustomed them to our neglect of personal work. Custom is a strong force among the people. Where it is the custom among the Papists, they do not hesitate to confess their sins to the priest; but, among us, they refuse to be catechised or instructed because it is not their custom. They wonder at it as an odd thing, and say, 'Such things were never done before.'

And if we could only make this duty as common as other duties, they would submit to it more readily. What a happy thing it would be if we should live to see the day when people of all ages come to their pastors for personal advice and help in their salvation, just as it is now normal for them to come to church to hear a sermon or receive the sacrament! Our diligence in this work is the way to bring this about.

Personal work touches the leaders of our country

Personal work gives the leaders of the nation a correct view of the nature and burden of the ministry, and so may induce them to offer further assistance. It is a sad hindrance to the reformation of the Church and the saving of souls that, in most of the populated cities, there are only one or two men to oversee many thousands of souls; and so there are not enough labourers equal to the work. It is impossible for them to do any considerable measure of counselling that all faithful pastors should be doing among their flocks. I have often said, and I say it again, that much of England's misery is due to a spiritual famine in most cities and large towns throughout the land. The tragedy is that most people are unaware of it, and think they are well-provided for.

Alas! We see multitudes of ignorant, worldly, pleasure-seeking sinners around us - here a family, there a family, and almost a whole street or village of them - and our hearts go out to them when we see them in such need, crying out loudly for our speedy and diligent relief. **'He who has an ear let him hear'**. If we were of a mind, we could help them. It is not just through their obstinacy, but also through our failure to take up the opportunity. We have found by experience that if we take the time to speak to them, and tell them clearly of their sins and danger, we would have great hopes of doing many of them good, even when they reject our public preaching. But we cannot come to them because more necessary work, in our view, prevents us. We cannot do both at the same time, and our public work comes first because we are able to minister to many at once. Unfortunately, our public work takes up so much time; and if we did make time to do personal work, we would have no time for eating or sleeping (which would probably ruin our weakened bodies). In any case, we could not see them all, and speak to them all. Must we stand by and see the people perish? We are so sorry for them, but have no time to speak to them to try and reform them. Is not this a sad case in a nation that glories in the fullness of the gospel? An unbeliever says, 'No; but, I think that there is no one who, believing in everlasting joy or torment, who could give an answer.'

Let me give you a personal example. In our town there are two pastors in our church and a third at the chapel, all willing to spend every hour of our time in Christ's work. Before we took up personal work, our hands were full. But now we set apart two days per week, from morning to night, for private catechising and instruction. Anyone can see that we have left undone all the other work we used to do. We take up the public work of preaching with little preparation, and so deliver the message of God extempore, and in a haphazard fashion. This hardly meets the need of men's souls; and it troubles our minds to think

about it, and is a greater trouble to us when we are doing it. Yet it must be so; for there is no remedy for unprepared sermons unless we do away with our personal work. To omit this would be unthinkable, for it is a great and necessary work. Even accepting these limitations, we set aside two whole days a week for counselling, and that means that we will hardly be able to visit the parish once a year (being about 800 families). And, what is worse, we will be forced to cut it short, and do it less effectively by visiting about fifteen families a week. Alas, how little the time we have when we speak to only one person once a year, and that cursorily, considering the need! Yet we live in hope of some fruit from this. How much better it might be if we could speak to them once a quarter, and do the work more fully and carefully as those who are in smaller parishes do! Many pastors in England actually have ten times the number of parishioners than I do. That means that should they undertake the work as I have, they will only visit the entire parish once in ten years. While we are hoping for opportunities to speak to our families in the parish, we hear that some of them have died, one after another. To the great grief of our souls, we have been forced to go with them to their graves before we could speak one word to them personally and prepare them for their change. What is the cause of all this misery? Why, our leaders do not see the necessity of providing any more than one or two pastors in large parishes; and so they have not given the money for extra salaries. Some people have been alienated from the Church as a result. May the Lord humble all those who voted for this, lest it consume the nation in the end! This spiritual famine reigns in all the main parts of our land. It has made it inevitable that some will separate themselves from the national Church and gather together in the Independent churches, and say, 'Let the rest sink or swim! If the ordinary people are not saved under public preaching, let them be damned', is their argument. But whether this is a charitable and Christian course to take is not a difficult question to answer.

But what is of deep concern is when wise and godly rulers are guilty of our misery, yet none will listen to our pleas to awaken their compassion? What! Are they so ignorant as not to know these things? Or have they grown cruel to the souls of men? Or are they false-hearted to the interest of Christ, and are they plotting to undermine his kingdom? No, I hope it is none of these things. From what I can discover, it is we who are to blame - the pastors of the gospel. There are pastors in small parishes, who could take up this personal work, yet they will not do it, or at least very few of them will. And those in large towns and cities that could do something, but not a lot, will do nothing except what comes their way by chance. They cannot see the usefulness of it. Yet if they saw a minister who was careless and lazy, would they not stop his salary? They will not support idle drones. However, they think that if they maintain pastors enough to preach in the pulpit, they have done their duty. They are thus made party to a grievous sin, and we are involved also.

However, let us be determined to do personal work, and show to the authorities that it is a most important and necessary part of our job, and that we would do it more thoroughly if we had a few extra hands. When they see the happy success of our labours, then, no doubt, with the fear of God before them, and with a love for truth and men's souls, they will offer extra help, and not let men perish because there is no one to speak to them. They will surely, one way or another, raise the extra salaries for such populated areas, proportional to the number of souls and the greatness of the work. Let them observe us go with a will to the work, and let them see it prosper in our hands. If it is well managed, as no doubt it will be, resulting in God's blessing, their hearts will be drawn to promoting it. And, instead of letting parishes diminish under the hands of a few teachers, they will provide for more teachers. But when they see many worldly-minded pastors calling for higher salaries, and nothing for more help in the work of God, they will be tempted to wrong the Church, thinking that pastors are living a life of ease and plenty.

Personal work makes pastoral work easier

Personal work makes pastoral work much easier as time goes on. Custom, as I said before, is the thing that sways a crowd; and those who destroy a destructive custom must bear the brunt of the people's indignation. Now, somebody must do something. If we do not attempt it now, the burden will fall on our successors. And how can we be sure that they will be more resolute and faithful than us? It is we who have seen the heavy judgement of the Lord, and heard him pleading with fire and sword in the land. It is we who have been in the furnace of affliction, and should have come out refined. It is we who have made oaths and covenants, and seen wonderful deliverances, and experienced mercies of all sorts. And if we still flinch and turn our backs, and prove false-hearted, why should we expect others who have not been driven by such scourges, drawn by such cords? But, if they do prove better than us, the same resentment and opposition will fall on them that we have tried to avoid, and that with some increase because of our neglect. For the people will tell them that we, their predecessors, did nothing.

But, if we break the ice for them, their souls will bless us, and our names will be dear to them, and they will receive the happy fruits of our labours every day of their ministry. The people will freely submit to their private instruction and examination, yes, and discipline too, because we acquainted them with it, removed their prejudice, and broke the evil custom that our predecessors started. Thus, we can do much towards the saving of many thousands of souls in the ages to come, as well as in the present age.

Personal work benefits family life

Personal work helps in the proper ordering of families, and the better spending of the Lord's Day. When we have once got the masters of families to undertake, every Sunday, to examine their children and servants, and make them repeat part of their catechism and some passages of Scripture, this will prove to be a most profitable employment, whereas many of them would otherwise be idle or under-employed. Many heads of households, who know little themselves, may yet be brought to do this for others, and, in this way, even teach themselves something.

Personal work combats idleness

Personal work is good for many pastors who are liable to be idle, and mis-spend their time in unnecessary chit-chat, business, journeys, or recreations. It makes them see that much of their time is wasted. But when they are engaged in such pressing spiritual employment, it will be the best cure for their idleness and waste of time. Besides, it will limit the scandal that usually follows such misuses of time, for people are apt to say, 'Such-and-such a minister spends his time at bowls, or other sports, or in idle talk, so why can't we?' Let us do our work diligently, and then see what time we can spare for leisure pursuits or pleasures.

Personal work brings many benefits

Personal work brings many personal benefits to us. It does much good in curbing our own slackness, and in exercising and increasing our graces. It brings peace to our conscience and comforts us when our past life comes under review. While provoking others to repentance and heavenly-mindedness, we will do much to excite them in ourselves. To cry down the sin of others, and help them make war against it, will do much to shame us out of our own sins, for our conscience will hardly allow us to participate in what we are so busy in protecting others from. Our constant employment for God, and the busying of our minds and tongues in the war against sin, and our desire for Christ and holiness, will do

much to overcome our worldly inclinations both by way of mortification and diversion. This will leave our fancies no room or time for their old employment! All the austerities of monks and hermits who were addicted to unprofitable solitude, and who thought they could save themselves by withdrawing from works of compassion, will not do as much good through a true work of mortification as the producing of fruit for Christ in personal work.

Personal work deals with reality

Personal work has this benefit, in that it will take our minds off foolish controversies, and also the spending of our care and zeal on the least important matters of the faith that do little to edify us spiritually. While we are taken up with teaching, they will be learning the fundamental truths of the gospel, and we will be diverting our minds and tongues from lesser things. Personal work is a great cure for bickering and contention between pastors and people. We are often tempted into doing what we need not and should not do because we are engaged in doing what needs to be done.

Personal work is part of a reforming work

Let us consider the extent of these benefits of personal work. The purpose of this kind of work is the reforming and saving of all the people in our different parishes. We should not leave out anyone who will accept instruction. And though we can hardly hope that every individual will be reformed and saved, we do have reason to think that, as we make the attempt, success will be greater than any we have ever experienced before. I am sure that it is most likely that the spirit and precept and offer the gospel of Christ to every creature will be matched with the promise of life to everyone who will accept by faith. **'God our Saviour ... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.'** (1 Timothy 2:4) Being the Chief Shepherd and Benefactor of the world, he has shown himself willing to save all men if they so desire, for he makes his elect willing. So surely we ought to offer salvation to all men, and try to bring them to know the truth. And, if it true that Christ tasted **'death for everyone'** (Hebrews 2:9), then it is right that we should preach his death to everyone. This work is wider than our casual discussions with particular people, and, as I have already said, in such discussions, pastors are often satisfied with having spoken some good words, but seldom speak plainly of men of sin and misery and mercy.

Personal work is a good example to others

Personal work is likely to become widespread throughout the country, and not stop with us who are engaged in it now. The cause of our neglect at the present time, I think, is the same with our other brothers, namely, lethargy and laziness, both of which we are bewailing here this day. There is another reason: we doubt that the people will accept it. But as we remind other pastors of so clear and great a duty, and they see how practical it is when accepted by the people, they will, no doubt, take it up themselves, and gladly labour with us in so blessed a task. After all, they are the servants of the same God, have the same interest in Christ, and the same compassion for men's souls. I am sure they will be as conscientious and self-denying and ready to suffer to obtain such excellent results as we are. Seeing, then, that they have the same spirit, rule, and Lord, I will not be so uncharitable as to doubt whether godly pastors throughout the land (or, at least, most of them) will stand with us. And oh, what a happy thing it will be to see us combining our forces for Christ, and see all England called upon in all seriousness to turn to Christ, and so be sent on their way to heaven! I think that this prospect should make our hearts rejoice to see so many faithful servants of Christ all over the land addressing the gospel message to every sinner personally, and hardly accepting a denial. I even see all the godly pastors of England commencing this work already, making the best of the

opportunity.

Personal work and national reformation

Lastly, so important is personal work that we are recommending it as the main answer to the Church's reformation. It is the means of answering the judgements, the mercies, the prayers, the promises, the cost, the endeavours, and the blood of the nation. Without personal work, these things will never be answered. Thus reformation will never come, the Church will still remain in a low state, the interests of Christ will still be neglected, and God will still have a great controversy with the land. Above all, he will condemn the ministry that carries the greatest guilt.

How long we speak of reformation! How much do I recommend the means to bring it about! How deeply and devoutly we vow to take up personal work in our own parishes! Yet, after saying all this, how shamefully we still neglect it even to this present day! We live as though we know nothing of the reformation we vow to bring about. We live as though our people are all true Christians, and profess with confidence that they all believe in Christ and accept his salvation, and contend for Christ and fight on his side. Yet, for all that, we must admit that some will have nothing to do with him and will perish for refusing him. They do not understand what salvation is, and how it works out, but dream of a salvation without self-denial and a renunciation of the world, without parting from sin, without holiness, and without subservience to Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Too many pastors, who speak and write and pray and fight and long for reformation, find it difficult to believe that, despite their profession, their hearts are actually against reformation. How strange that those who pray for it, and fast for it, and wade through blood for it, find it impossible to accept it, but are the rejecters and destroyers of it! Yet it is so, as I have proved. How is it that through some strange deceit of the heart good men cannot understand this? Indeed, the case is plain enough! They think a reformation that is given by God, but never of a reformation that is to be effected in themselves. They consider the blessing but never the means of accomplishing it. Do they expect everything to be mended without them, or that the Holy Spirit will come down again miraculously, or that every sermon will convert thousands of souls, or that some angel from heaven, or some Elijah, will be sent to restore all things? Do they imagine that some law of Parliament, or the court of the local magistrate, will convert or constrain everything, and do the deed? Little do they consider a reformation that will come about through their own diligence and untiring labours, with earnest preaching, and catechising, and personal instruction, and taking care of all the flock, at whatever cost. They cannot imagine a thorough-going reformation multiplying their own work. They think in worldly terms, that when they have ungodly men at their mercy, all that needs to be done is to conquer and convert them by frightening them into heaven.

But the business is very different. Had we known how a reformation is brought about, perhaps some of us would have been colder in its prosecution. I know that the prospect of personal work seems a small task at a distance, while we are still talking about the task. But when we draw near, and set our hands to the work, and put on our armour, and charge through the thickest of the foes, then our sincerity and the strength our hearts is put to the test.

Reformation to many of us is like the Messiah to the Jews. Before Christ came, they looked and longed for him, and boasted of him, and rejoiced in hope of him. But when he came, they could not stand him, and hated him, and would not believe in him, and persecuted him, and put him to death to the curse and confusion of their nation.

“And the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold he is coming’, says the Lord of hosts. “But who can endure the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.” (Malachi 2:1-3)

The reason for this was because he was a different Messiah than what they expected. They were looking for someone to bring them riches and freedom; and even to this day they profess that they will never believe in anyone else. So it is with many concerning reformation. They hope for a reformation that will bring them wealth, honour with the people, and power to force men to do what they want. And now they see a reformation that brings them into the way of humility and pain, something they did not expect. They thought they would have the opposers of godliness put under their feet, but now they see they must go to them with humble entreaties, and put their hands under their feet if they would do them any good. They must come humbly to those who once sought their lives, and make it their daily business to shower them with kindness, and win them with love. Oh, how many worldly expectations have been frustrated!

ARTICLE 2

MOTIVES FROM THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE WORK

Having given you the first kind of reasons drawn from the benefits of the work, I come to the second, which are drawn from the *difficulties* of the work. If these were taken alone, I confess they are more discouragements than motives; but taking them together with those that have gone before, the case is rather different. Difficulties should stimulate us to greater diligence in our work, and difficulties we find in abundance, both in ourselves and in our people! But because they are so obvious, and that your experience should leave no room for doubt, I will pass them over in a few words.

1. The difficulties that lie in ourselves.

(1) In ourselves, we find a great deal of dullness and laziness, so that it is not easy to motivate ourselves to be faithful in such a difficult work. Like the sluggard in his bed, who knows that he should get up, but delays it so that he can lie there as long as possible (see Proverbs 6:9-11), so also we in our duties, to which our corrupt natures make us averse. This will stretch our powers to the utmost, for sloth ties the hands of many.

(2) We have a man-pleasing disposition that will allow us to let men perish rather than lose their love, and let them go quietly to hell lest we make them angry with us for seeking their salvation. We are ready to risk the displeasure of God and the everlasting misery of our people rather than experience their ill will. This frame of mind must be vigorously resisted.

(3) Many of us are shy, so much so that it makes us backward in speaking plainly to sinners. We are so ultra-modest that we blush to speak for Christ or contradict the devil or save a soul, while, at the same time, we have less shame over sinful works.

(4) We are so worldly-minded that we are drawn by our worldly interests to be unfaithful in the work of Christ lest we reduce our income, or bring trouble on ourselves, or set people against us, and such like things. All these things require watchfulness in order to resist them.

(5) We are so weak in our faith that this is the greatest hindrance of all. When we would set to with a will to bring a man to the point of conversion, and affirm our belief in the reality of heaven and a hell, our belief is so feeble that it is difficult to spark in us a resolute and constant zeal. Our motivation is weak because the spring of our faith is weak. Oh, what need there is for pastors in their work to nourish their faith, especially in Scriptural teaching concerning the joys or torments of the life to come. This will take away our conviction and life!

(6) Lastly, we know that within us there is little skill and fitness for the work. Alas! How few know how to deal adequately with an ignorant, worldly man for his conversion! To get to him, and win his heart, and to suit our words to his condition, and to choose the best subjects, and follow them up with a holy mixture of seriousness, terror, love, humility, and evangelical appeal, who is fit for these things? I tell you seriously, it seems to me that it is harder to talk of spiritual matters with a worldly person as to preach sermons. All these difficulties within ourselves should awaken us to holy resolution, preparation, and diligence, that we may not be overwhelmed by them, and hindered from doing the work.

2. Difficulties we meet in our people

(1) Many of them are too unwilling to be taught, and are reluctant to come to us because they think they are too good to be catechised, or too old to learn, unless we speak to them carefully in public or in private. By force of reason and the power of love, let us overcome their waywardness.

(2) Many that are willing are so slow that they can hardly learn one page of a catechism over a long period of time. They will keep away from us for shame of their ignorance unless we learn to encourage them.

(3) When they do come, so great is their ignorance, that you will find it very hard to get them to understand anything at all. Unless you have the happy knack of making things simple, they will leave you as ignorant as before.

(4) Harder still is to work on their heart and bring peace to their conscience so as to produce a saving change – surely this is our great aim, and without which our labour is in vain. Oh, what a block, what a rock, is a hardened, worldly heart! How strongly it resists the most powerful arguments, and treats things concerning everlasting life or death as nothing! If, therefore, you do have great seriousness and fervency and persuasion, what good results do you expect? And when you have done all, the Spirit of grace will do his work. But just as God and men choose instruments suitable for the nature of the work, so the Spirit of wisdom, life, and holiness does not work with foolish, dead, worldly instruments, but persuades with light and life and purity those who are most likely to do the work that needs to be done.

(5) Lastly, unless you make some impression on their hearts, and take some special care over them, their hearts will soon return to their former hardness, and old companions, and temptations, which will destroy them all over again. In short, all the difficulties of the work of conversion which you preach to your people about lie before us in our present work.

ARTICLE 3

MOTIVES FROM THE NECESSITY OF THE WORK

The third group of motives is drawn from the *necessity* of the work. For if the work were not necessary, the slothful might fall away, discouraged rather than excited by the difficulties I have mentioned. But because I have already been longer than I intended I will give you only a brief sketch of some of the main grounds for this necessary duty.

1. Personal work is necessary for the glory of God.

As every Christian should live for the glory of God, he will be glad to do whatever most effectively promotes it. For what believer would not attain this end? Oh, my brothers, if we could only set this work in motion in all the parishes of England, and get our own people to accept it, and then do it skilfully and zealously, what glory it would bring to our nation, and what glory it would bring to God! If our reluctance were banished, and our vanity and idleness turned into a study of life, and every shop and every house encouraged to learn the Scriptures and the catechism, and witness to the Word and works of God, what pleasure God would take in our cities and country! He would surely dwell in our habitations, and make them his delight. It is the glory of Christ that shines in his saints, and all their glory is his glory. Whatever brings honour to faithful pastors will bring honour to him. Will not the glory of Christ be wonderfully displayed in the New Jerusalem, when it descends from heaven in all that splendour and magnificence with which it is described in the Book of Revelation? If, then, we can increase the number and strength of the saints, we will also increase the glory of the King of saints, for he will have service and praise where, before, he had disobedience and dishonour. Christ will also be honoured in the fruits of the shedding of his blood, and the Spirit of grace in the fruit of his working. And do not such important fruits as these require that we should use the means with diligence?

Every Christian is obliged to do all that he can for the salvation of others; but every minister is doubly obliged because he is separated for the gospel of Christ, and must give himself entirely to that work. It is unnecessary to question our duty when we know that personal work is needed for our people's conversion and salvation, and that we are commanded to do all that we can to achieve these ends. That the unconverted need converting, I hope, is not in doubt among us. And whether personal work is a means - and a most important means - experience puts beyond doubt.

Let those who would work hard in their public work examine their people, and see whether any of them are not nearly as ignorant and careless as the ones who have not yet heard the gospel. As you know, I prepare to preach as simply and movingly as I can. Yet I am still coming across those who have been in my congregation for eight or ten years who do not know if Christ is God or man, and marvel when I tell them the history of his birth and life and death. It is as if they had never heard these things before. And of those who know the history of the gospel, how few know the nature of that faith, repentance, and holiness that it required, or, at least, know their own hearts? But most of them have an unfounded trust in Christ, hoping that he will pardon, justify, and save them, while the world grasps their hearts, and they live for the flesh. And this trust they take as justifying faith. I have found by experience that some ignorant people who have long been unprofitable hearers have got more knowledge and remorse of conscience in half an hour's personal interview than in ten years of preaching.

I know that preaching the gospel in public is a great calling, and we can address many at the same time. But it is usually far more effective to preach privately to particular sinners, for the plainest preacher that ever lived can barely speak simply enough in public for them

to understand. But, in private, we can carry the work forward. In public, we cannot use the homely expressions or repetitions that they need; but, in private, we can. In public, our speeches are long, and beyond the capacity of their understanding and memory. They are astounded and at a loss, and are not able to follow us. One thing drives out another, and they cannot remember what we said. But, in private, we can pursue the work gradually, and carry our hearers along with us. By our questions and their answers we can see how much they understand, and what we should do next. In public, the length of the sermon quickly loses their attention; but when they are allowed to ask questions, we can easily catch their attention. Besides, we can answer their objections before we leave them by reminding them of God's promises - something we cannot do in public. I conclude, therefore, that public preaching is not enough. For though it has been an effective means of converting many, yet not so many as we imagine - as experience and God's appointment of further means has proved. You may study long, and preach to little effect, if you neglect the duty of personal work.

2. Personal work is necessary for the welfare of your people.

Brothers, can you look at your people and not see them calling out to you for help? There is not a sinner whose case should not draw out your compassion. You should be willing to relieve them at any cost, as did the Samaritan the wounded man by the roadside (see Luke 10:25-37), and surely you cannot pass by without showing mercy? Can you not hear them crying out to you, like the man of Macedonia to Paul in a vision, **'Come over to Macedonia and help us'** (Acts 16:9-10), and you still refuse to help them? What would you do if you were in charge of a hospital? There lies a suffering patient in his bed, and another crying out in pain in another: 'Oh, help me, pity me, for the Lord's sake!' A third patient is raging mad, and wants to destroy himself and you. Will you sit idly by and refuse any help? If you condemn the nurse for not relieving men's bodies, how much more should you feel towards anyone who refuses to relieve men's souls! **'Whoever sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?'** (1 John 3:17) You are not such a hard-hearted monster that you will not take pity on a leper. Indeed, you pity the destitute, the prisoner, and the desolate, and you pity those who are tormented with grievous pains or sickness. Will you not, then, pity an ignorant, hard-hearted sinner? Will you not pity one who will be shut out from the presence of the Lord, and dwell without remedy under his wrath if he does not repent - something you could prevent by telling him the gospel?

Oh, what sort of heart has no pity for such a sinner! What shall I call the heart of such a man - a heart of stone, a rock of granite, the heart of a tiger, or, rather, the heart of an unbeliever? Surely, if he believed in the misery of the unrepentant, it would be impossible for him not to take pity on him. Do you tell your hearers from the pulpit that they will certainly be condemned unless they repent, and yet have no pity on them after you have told them of the danger? And if you pity them, will you not go out of your way for their salvation? How many around you are blindly hastening to perdition while God has given you a voice to rouse and reclaim them? The physician has no excuse when he has sworn to relieve sickness, and even the neighbours are bound to help. My brothers, what if you heard sinners crying out to you in the streets, 'O sir, have pity on me, and give me your counsel! I am afraid of the everlasting wrath of God. I know I must shortly leave this world, and I am afraid of being miserable in the next.' Would you deny your help to such poor sinners? What if they came to your study-door, and cried for help, and would not go away till you had told them how to escape the wrath of God? Could you find it in your heart to drive them away without counsel? I am sure you would not.

Why, alas! Such people are less miserable than the one who remains silent, and does not cry out for help. It is the hardened sinner who does not want your help; yet he is in most

need of it. The man who has not enough sense to know that he is spiritually dead, nor enough light to see his danger, nor enough sense to pity himself - this is the man that is most to be pitied. Look at your neighbours around you and consider how many of them need your help because they are in danger of damnation. Suppose you heard every unrepentant sinner near you crying to you for help: 'If you ever pitied poor wretches, pity us, lest we go tormented into the flames of hell. If you have the heart of a man, take pity on us!' Would you not be moved to help them?

Oh, how can you walk and talk and be merry when you know of such people? I think that when you look them in the face, and think how they must suffer everlasting misery, you will burst into tears like the prophet did when he looked upon Hazeel (see 2 Kings 8:11-12), and listen to their urgent cries. When you visit them in their sickness, will it not wound your hearts to see them about to depart into misery before you have ever spoken to them about the conversion of their souls? Oh, then, for the Lord's sake, and for the sake of poor souls, take pity on them, do something, and spare no pains to bring them to salvation.

3. Personal work is necessary for your own welfare

This is your work, on the basis of which, among others, you will be judged. You can no more be saved without pastoral diligence and faithfulness than they can be saved without Christian diligence and faithfulness. If, therefore, you do not care for others, at least care for yourself. Oh, what a dreadful thing it is to answer for the neglect of such a charge! And what sin is greater than the neglect of souls? Does not that make you tremble? "**When I say to the wicked, "O wicked man, you shall surely die!" and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand?**" (Ezekiel 33:8) I am afraid - no, I have no doubt - that the day is drawing near when unfaithful pastors will wish that they had never taken up the charge of souls, but would rather wish to be coal miners or sweeps or tinkers than pastors of Christ's flock. Besides their own sins, they will have the blood of so many other souls to answer for.

Oh, my brothers, our death, as well as our people's, draws near, and it is as fearful for an unfaithful pastor as for anyone. When we see that we must die, we resign ourselves to our fate, for there is no remedy. No wit, no learning, no popular applause, can avert the stroke, or delay the time. But, willing or unwilling, our souls must go into a world we have never seen, and where our reputation and worldly interests count for nothing. Oh, then, for a clear conscience! Instead, we may declare, 'I did not live for myself but for Christ; I ignored the pain; I did not hide my talents; I did not hide from men's misery, nor from the way of their recovery.' O reverend sirs, let us seize the hour while we have it, and work while it is day, '**... the night is coming when no one can work.**' (John 9:4) This is our day too; and, by doing good to others, we will do good to ourselves. If you are expecting a comfortable death, and a great and glorious reward, the harvest lies before you - '**Gird up the loins of your mind**' (1 Peter 1:13), and, as the Philistines said, '**Conduct yourselves like men**' (1 Samuel 4:9), that you may end your days with these triumphant words - '**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day**'. (1 Timothy 4:7-8) If you would be blessed with those who die in the Lord, labour now, and you will rest from your labours then. Do the works that you would like to follow you, and not those that will surely bring you to terror at the great Judgement.

ARTICLE 4

THE APPLICATION OF THESE MOTIVES

Having found so many powerful reasons to move us to take up personal work, I now apply them further for our humiliation and stimulation.

1. What good reason can we give the Lord today for our neglect?

We have been pastors of the gospel many years, and yet we have done so little by way of personal instruction and counsel for the saving of men's souls. If only we had set about this business sooner, who knows how many souls we might have brought to Christ, and how much happier our congregations might have been? And why did we not do it sooner rather than now? I confess there were many hindrances on the way, and they remain still while there is a devil to tempt us, and a corrupt heart us to resist the light. But while hindrances remain, in our own darkness and dullness and indisposition to do personal work, and our disunity, and our unfitness to engage in the work of God, I cannot see how we could have taken up the work. We had the same God to command us, and the same sinners as objects of our compassion, and the same liberty from the government as we have now. Yet we have sinned, and we have no excuse for our sin. Our sin is great because the duty is so great; and we are afraid of putting forward any more excuses. May the God of mercy forgive us, together with all the ministry of England, and lay not this, or any of our pastoral omissions, to our charge! Oh, that he would cover all our unfaithfulness, and, by the blood of the everlasting covenant, wash away our guilt of the blood of souls, that when the Chief Shepherd appears, we will stand before him in peace, and not be condemned for scattering his flock!

And oh, that he would set aside the controversy that he has against the pastors of his Church, and not condemn them, nor allow enemies or persecutors to scatter them, as they have done in the past! May he not care as little for us as we have done for the souls of men, nor think his salvation too good for us as we have thought our labour and sufferings too great for men's salvation! As we suffered many days of humiliation in England for the sins of the land, and the many judgements that fell on us, I hope we shall soon hear that God has thoroughly humbled the pastors, and caused them to bewail their own neglect. May they set apart some days for that end, that they may not think it enough to lament the sins of others while overlooking their own! May God not be displeased with our solemn national humiliation because we do not have humble leaders and guides! Let us first prevail upon him for pardon for us that we may be in a better position to beg for the pardon of others.

Let us cast out the filth of our pride, contention, self-seeking, and idleness, lest God cast our sacrifices as filth in our faces, and throw them out as refuse on the earth, as he has been doing lately as a warning to us. Let us now resolve peacefully to mend our ways before we feel a sharper spur than any spur we have felt up till now.

2. The denial of our flesh

And now, brothers, what shall we do in the days to come but deny our lazy flesh, and rouse ourselves to take up the work that is laid out before us? **'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few.'** (Matthew 9:37) The loiterers and hinderers are many, the souls of men are precious, the misery of sinners is great, and the everlasting misery to which they draw near is imminent; the joys of heaven are beyond words, the comfort of a faithful minister is not small, and the joy of success will be a rich reward. To

be fellow-workers with God and his Spirit is a great honour. To speak of the shed blood of Christ for men's salvation is no light thing. To lead on the armies of Christ through the thickest of the enemy, to guide them safely through a dangerous wilderness, to steer the vessel through storms and rocks and sands and shelves, and bring it safe to the harbour of rest, requires great skill and diligence.

The fields are now '**white unto harvest**'; the preparations that have been made for us are considerable; the season for working is at present more calm than many ages before us. We have waited too long already; the present time is passing away. While we are trifling, men are dying. Oh, how fast are men passing into the other world! And is there nothing in all this to awaken us to our duty, nothing to resolve us to a speedy and unwearied diligence? Can we think that a man is too blind to see all these motives? Can a man be a useful instrument for other men's illumination when he himself is blind, or for the enlivening of others when he is so lifeless? What, brothers! Are you, who are men of wisdom, as dull as the common people? And do we need to heap up a multitude of words to persuade you to perform such a clear and responsible duty? One would think it enough to send you to the work by showing you a line from the Book of God to prove it to be his will, and to prove to you that the work leads to the promotion of men's salvation. One would think that the very sight of your miserable neighbours would be motive enough to draw out your most compassionate endeavours for their relief. If a cripple uncovers his sores, or shows you his disabled limbs, it should move you beyond words.

But it is not the case that souls, who are so near to damnation, will move you. O happy church, when the physicians heal themselves! If only we had not too much of that unfaithfulness and stupidity that we daily preach against in others, and were more deeply persuaded by those things we seek to persuade others of, and were more moved with the wonderful things that we would move them with! If only we were impressed in our souls by those glorious things that we daily preach, what a difference it would make in our sermons and in our private life!

Oh, what a wretched thing it is in the Church that men preach of heaven and hell before they believe in such things, or feel the weight of the doctrines they proclaim! What we teach and preach and speak about is truly amazing. Consider the soul passing out of this flesh and appearing before a righteous God, and entering into unchangeable joy or unchangeable torment! Oh, with what amazement dying men consider these things! Oh, with what gravity and seriousness and untiring labour we should preach and speak of these things! I do not know what others think of it, but, for my part, I am ashamed of my stupidity, and wonder that I do not treat others like that - souls looking for the great day of the Lord. It is a wonder that I can think of anything else. I marvel how I can preach of them lightly and coldly, and how I can let men alone in their sins, and not go to them and beg them, for the Lord's sake, to repent, whatever trouble it may cost me! I seldom come out of the pulpit but my conscience tells me that I have not been serious and fervent enough.

My conscience accuses me, not so much of lack of eloquence or elegant words, but with such questions as, 'How could you speak of life and death with such an unmoved heart? How could you preach of heaven and hell in such a careless, sleepy manner? Do you believe in what you are saying? Are you in earnest or in jest? How can you tell people that sin is such an evil thing, and that so much misery comes from it, and not be more affected by your own words? Should you not weep over your people, and should not your tears interrupt your words? Should you not cry out and show them their transgressions, and entreat them to consider these life and death issues?' Really, this is the peal that conscience rings in my ears; yet my drowsy soul takes no notice.

Oh, what a senseless thing is a hardened heart!

Here is a suitable prayer:

'O Lord, save us from the plague of unfaithfulness and hard-heartedness in ourselves, or else how can we be useful instruments in saving others from it? O Lord, work on our own souls before you use us to work on the souls of others!'

I am astonished to think what a different attitude I have to the world to come when I am on my sickbed, or when I am in the pulpit. What seemed so light a matter to me in the pulpit is quite different when death stares me in the face. Dear reverend sirs, if you had all conversed you're your neighbour Death as often as I have, and as often received its sentence in your life, you would have quite a different conscience, if not a reformed life, as regards your pastoral diligence and faithfulness. And you would frequently hear in your mind such questions as these: 'Is this all the compassion I have for lost sinners? Can I do any more to seek and to save them? Is there not so-and-so who has just died, and how many others are there like him? What have I said to them or done for their conversion? Will they die and go to hell because I did not speak to them one serious word to prevent it? Will they curse me in hell forever because I did not take the time to save them?'

Such cries of the conscience ring daily in my ears, though the Lord knows I have not listened to them enough. May the God of mercy pardon me, and awaken me, with the rest of his servants who have been sinfully negligent! I confess to my shame that I seldom hear the bell toll for someone who has died but my conscience asks, 'What did you do for the saving of that soul before it left the body? There is another gone to judgement. What did you do to prepare him for the judgement?' Yet I have been lazy and backward in helping people who have survived death. Do you not ask when you lay to rest the body in the grave, 'Here lies the body; but where is the soul? And what did I do for it before it departed? It was part of my charge; so what account can I give of it?'

O reverend gentlemen, can you easily answer such questions as these? It may be that you can now, but the hour is coming when it will not be so. **'For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.'** (1 John 3:20) But we will be condemned much more with a worse kind of condemnation that comes from the conscience. The voice of conscience is a still voice, and the sentence of conscience is a gentle sentence in comparison with the voice and the sentence of God! Alas! Conscience sees only a little of our sin and misery in comparison with what God sees. What mountains these things will appear to your souls that now seem like molehills! What beams they will be in your eye, which seem like motes now if you could see them in a clearer light? (I dare not say, 'As God sees them!') We could easily plead the cause with conscience, and either bribe it or reduce its sentence. But God is not so easily dealt with, nor his sentence so easily set aside. **'Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.'** (Hebrews 12:28-29) But, in order that you may not charge me with frightening you for nothing, and telling you of dangers and terrors when there are none, I will now show you the certainty of the condemnation that will fall upon negligent pastors. I will also show how they are ready to rise up against us and condemn us if we continue to neglect personal work.

(1) Our parents, who dedicated us to the ministry, will condemn us, and say, 'Lord, we dedicated them to your service, and they have made light of it and served themselves.'

(2) Our professors that taught us, our tutors that instructed us, the schools and universities that educated us, and all the years in which we studied, will rise up in judgement against us and condemn us. For why did we do all this, if it was not to equip us for the work of God?

- (3)** Our learning and knowledge and pastoral gifts will condemn us. For to what end were we made partakers of these things except for the work of God?
- (4)** Our free undertaking to care for souls will condemn us, for all pastors should be faithful to the trust they promised to take up.
- (5)** All the care of God for his Church, and all that Christ has done and suffered for her, will rise up in judgement against us to condemn us if we are negligent and unfaithful. For by our neglect we ruin those for whom Christ died.
- (6)** All the precepts and commands of Holy Scripture, all the promises of assistance and reward, all the threats of punishment, will rise up against us and condemn us; for God does not speak in vain.
- (7)** All the examples of the prophets and apostles, and other preachers recorded in Scripture, and all the examples of faithful and diligent servants of Christ around us in these days, will rise up in judgement and condemn us. For these are our role models in pastoral care and faithfulness.
- (8)** The Holy Bible that lies open before us, and all the books that told us of our duty, either directly or indirectly, will condemn our lazy and unprofitable service; for we should have responded better to all these aids.
- (9)** All the sermons we preached to encourage our people to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), and to lay violent hands on the crown of life and take the kingdom by storm (Matthew 11:12), and to strive to enter in at the narrow gate (Matthew 7:14), and to run so as to obtain (1 Corinthians 9:24), will rise up against our unfaithfulness and condemn us. For if we exhorted our hearers to labour for their salvation, does it not concern us, who have the charge over them, that we need also to be violent, laborious, and unwearied in our striving to help them with their salvation? If it is worth their labour and patience, is it not also worth ours?
- (10)** All the sermons we preached to them on the evils of sin, the dangers of the natural state, their need of a Saviour, the joys of heaven and the torments of hell, and, yes, the truths of the Christian faith, will again rise up in judgement against our unfaithful pastoral work and condemn us. What a sad review it will be on that day when we are forced to think, 'I told them of such great dangers and hopes in public, but would it not have been better to have spoken to them in private? What! Preach to them often of damnation, and yet let them run into it so easily! Preach to them of such glory, and scarcely speak a word to them personally to help them on their way? Were they not such great matters with me at church, and yet so small a matter when I came home?' Ah me, this is going to be a dreadful self-condemnation!
- (11)** All the sermons we preached to persuade others to take up such duties as neighbours exhorting one another daily, and parents and masters teaching their children and servants the way to heaven, these will rise up in judgement against our unfaithful service and condemn us. Do you persuade others to do what you are failing to do? When you threaten them for neglecting their duty, how much more are you threatening your own souls!
- (12)** All the money we receive for our service, if we are found to be unfaithful, will it not condemn us? For who pays his servant to take it easy, or sit idly by, or work in his own interests? If you possess the fleece, surely it is your duty to look after the flock. And by

taking wages, you take on the obligations that go with it.

(13) All the witness that we have affirmed against the scandalous behaviour of negligent pastors, and all the efforts we have made for their removal, will rise up to condemn our unfaithfulness; for God is no respecter of persons. If we follow them in their sins, we speak against ourselves; and, as we condemned them, God will condemn us if we imitate them. And, although we are not as bad as they are, it is sad if we are even a bit like them.

(14) If we remain unfaithful, all the judgements God has passed on negligent pastors in past ages will rise up before our very eyes to condemn us. Has he not made idle shepherds and worldly drones stink in the nostrils of the people? And will he continue to honour them today if they remain idle and worldly? Will he not remove them from their livings and their pulpits, and lay them aside as dead even while they are still alive? Will he not make them **'a proverb and a byword among the peoples'**? (1 Kings 9:7) Dare we imitate them? Are not their sufferings our warnings? And did not all this come about as an example to us? If anything in the world could awaken pastors to self-denial and diligence, I think that what we have seen is enough. Would we have imitated the ancient world if we had seen the flood that drowned it? Would we have condoned the sins of Sodom – **'pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness'** (Ezekiel 16:49) - if we had stood by and seen the flames that consumed her rising to heaven? Who would be a Judas after seeing him hanged and burst open? (See Acts 1:18) And who would remain a lying, unholy hypocrite after he had seen Ananias and Sapphira die? (See Acts 5:1-11) And who would not have been afraid to contradict the gospel after he had seen Elymas smitten with blindness? (See Acts 13:6-11) And shall we prove to be idle, self-seeking pastors when we have seen God scouring out his temple, and sweeping the priests away as dirt into heaps? (Malachi 3:1-3) God forbid! For then how great and how terrible would be our condemnation!

(15) Lastly, all the days of prayer and fasting that have been observed in England since the Reformation will rise up in judgement against unreformed pastors that will not be persuaded to take up personal work. I confess that this is so great a sin that it makes me tremble to think of it. Was there ever a nation on the face of the earth that so long, and so solemnly, followed God with fasting and prayer as we did? Before our government came into power, how frequently and fervently we prayed in secret! After that, for many years, we observed the monthly fast commanded by the government, beside frequent private and public fasts on other occasions. And what was it all for? Whatever it was, the main thrust of all our prayers was for Church reformation, and, as a result, a faithful ministry and the exercise of discipline in the Church. And did it ever enter into the minds of the people, or even into our hearts, to imagine that, when all is said and done, the matter has been put into our own hands? How painful it is to see how few have taken up this counselling work, and will do nothing but preach publicly?

We have men who do not care to catechise and instruct their people personally, nor exercise discipline? It astonishes me to think of it. What a depth of deceit lies rooted in the heart of man! What! Are the hearts of good men so deceitful! Are all men's hearts so deceitful? I confess that when I was in the army I told many soldiers and other men of the world that, though they were fighting for a reformation, I was sure that they would hate it when it came. They would become its enemies when they saw and felt it, thinking that the yoke of discipline was pinching their necks as they were catechised and personally counselled and reproofed for their sin, whether in private or in public. They would hate being brought to public confession and repentance. They would avoid it, and remain unrepentant, scorning and spurning it all. They would see the yoke of Christ as a tyranny. But little did I think that the pastors would do the same, and refuse it as their life's work, leaving it alone for fear of displeasing their people.

Oh, the earnest prayers I have heard for a suffering ministry and for discipline! It was as if they were wrestling for salvation itself. Yes, they did call it 'discipline', or the 'kingdom of Christ', or the exercise of his kingly office in his church. This is what they preached and prayed for, as if the setting up of discipline was the setting up of the kingdom. Yet I knew then that they would refuse it? What! Is the kingdom of Christ now reckoned among unimportant things? If only the God of heaven, who knows our hearts, had, in the midst of our prayers and cries at one of our monthly fasts, given us this fearful reply:

'You are deceitful-hearted sinners! What hypocrisy is this that you weary me with your cries for something you do not want; otherwise I would have given it you. How can you lift up your voices for something your soul hates! What is reformation but the instructing and earnest persuading of sinners to receive my Christ, and grace offered freely to them, and governing my Church according to my Word? Yet you will not be persuaded to take up this work when you discover it to be troublesome and unrewarding. When I delivered you, it was not me, but you who took up service. And I have worked hard to persuade you to reform the Church as a duty, as you have been in earnest with me to grant you liberty for reformation. And, when all is done, you have left the work undone; and it seems a long time before you will be persuaded to do my work.'

If the Lord or any messenger of his had given us such an answer, would it not have astonished us?

Does it not seem incredible that our hearts are what they are? And do we not respond with horror as Hazeal did to Elisha— '**But what is your servant – a dog, that he should do this gross thing?**' (2 Kings 8:13) Or as Peter exclaimed - '**Even if all are made to stumble [i.e. desert], yet I will not be?**' (Mark 14:29) Well, my brothers, costly experience proves our sad frailty. We are refusing the troublesome side of the reformation that we have prayed for. But Christ turns back and looks upon us with a merciful eye. (See (Luke 22:61) Oh, that we had Peter's heart and go out immediately and weep bitterly, lest, following this course no longer, a worse thing come upon us! Let us now follow Christ whom we have so far forsaken, though it may involve hard labour and suffering, and perhaps even death!

Now, I have shown you what will come of it if you do not do your personal work diligently, a work you promised to do. What an inexcusable thing our neglect has turned out to be, and how great and heavy is our condemnation! Truly, brothers, if I was not convinced that this work is very important to yourselves, to the people, and to the honour of God, I would not have troubled you with so many words about it. Nor would I have presumed to speak so sharply to you, as I have done. But when it involves the grave issues of life and death, men are liable to forget their reverence and courtesy and compliments and good manners! For my part, I know that this is one of the best works I ever put my hand to; and I sincerely think that, if you consider it as I do, you will not think my words too many or too sharp. I can well remember the time when I was hot for reformation in matters of ceremony. And if I was comparatively cold in such a substantial matter as that, how disorderly and disproportionate does my zeal appear for personal work! Alas! Do we think that reformation will come in when we cast out a few ceremonies, and change some of the vestures and gestures and forms! Oh no, gentlemen! It is the converting and saving of souls that is our business. That is the most important part of reformation; and it does the greatest good, and leads to the saving of the people.

Well now, my brothers, personal work lies before you. In the personal instruction of all the flock, as well as in public preaching, it has its being. Others have done their part and borne their burden; now it is your turn. You can easily see how much this matter rests in

your hands. Many have been wronged by your failure to do your duty, and so much has been lost through neglecting your responsibilities. If your work is more important than the souls of men and the blood of Christ, sit still, and do not seek out the ignorant and the ungodly. Follow your own pleasures and worldly business, and take your ease. Do not upset sinners or your own interests, but let your neighbours sink or swim. If public preaching does not save them, let them perish! But, if the result is otherwise, you had better look out!

ARTICLE 5

NINE OBJECTIONS TO PERSONAL WORK

I will now respond to some objections made against this duty.

OBJECTION 1:

We teach our people through public preaching. Why should we teach them person-to-person also?

ANSWER:

You pray for them in public. Cannot you pray for them in private also? Paul went around teaching and exhorting everybody both publicly and from house to house, day and night, with tears. (Acts 20:19-20) But what do we need to add when experience speaks so loudly in this matter? I am daily forced to wonder how sadly ignorant many of our people remain, who have been diligent listeners to me these ten or twelve years, while I preached as plainly as I can. Some of them do not yet know that each person in the Trinity is God, nor that Christ is both God and man, nor that he took his human nature to heaven, nor even what they must do to receive forgiveness and salvation. And many other important principles of our faith remain a mystery to them. Indeed, some who come often to our services are still ignorant, whereas, in one hour of private personal work, they appear to understand more, and grasp it better, than ever before.

OBJECTION 2:

Not all who reside in the parish come to my church, so I do not have pastoral charge over them. I am not convinced that I should take special care of them.

ANSWER:

I will pass over the question whether you should see the whole parish in your church, because in some places it is so, and in others it is not.

(a) The salary most of you receive is for teaching the whole parish, though you are not obliged to invite them to your church.

(b) What stronger obligation is needed than the common bond that exists between all Christians to further the work of men's salvation, the good of the Church, and the honour of God, to the utmost of our power? There is a bond also between pastors to further these ends by pastoral teaching to the utmost of our power? Here is a good work that apparently brings many blessings to the souls of men. Do you not see that you under an obligation to take it up?

OBJECTION 3:

This line of personal action will take up so much of our time that we will have little opportunity to continue with our studies. Most of us are young and inexperienced, and

need a lot of time to improve our abilities and increase our own knowledge. Personal work will put a stop to that.

ANSWER:

(1) We suppose that those whom we persuade to take up personal work understand the substance of the Christian faith, and are able to teach it to others. The addition of further and less necessary things should not come before this vital communication of the basic principles of the faith to others. I value knowledge highly, and would not encourage anyone to treat it lightly. But I value the saving of souls more. That work for which we are called must be done, and whatever else is left, let it remain undone. It is desirable for a physician to be thoroughly conversant with medicine, and to be able to treat the patients in his practice with confidence, and to diagnose correctly. However, suppose he took over a hospital, or lived in a city where an epidemic was raging. He would like to study, say, the subject of fermentation, or the circulation of the blood, or abscesses, or such like – and they are all excellent subjects. But he will not be able to, for he will be visiting his feverish patients and saving their lives. If he turned away from his patients and let them perish, and told them that he had no time to visit them because he had to follow his own studies, I would consider that man unfit to practice as a doctor. Indeed, I would call him a kind of murderer. Now, men's souls can be saved without them knowing that God has predestined them. They do not need to know that the understanding governs the will, or that God works his grace in a physical as well as a moral way, or that freewill is really free, or that God has issued positive decrees apportioning blame for certain evil deeds. There are hundreds of similar subjects you could read about in your books. But you should be out there saving souls. Get to heaven, and help your people to get there, and you will know all the answers to these things in a moment, and a thousand more that you will never have the time to look at in your studies. Is it not true that soul winning is a much better and more certain way to knowledge?

(2) If you do not grow extensively in knowledge, you can, in this practical way, gain intensively in knowledge. If you do not know as much as others do, you will know deeper things than they do. For this serious dealing with sinners in matters concerning their salvation will help you to get a far deeper understanding of the saving principles of the faith than you would ever obtain by other means. A little practical knowledge of these things is worth all the book-learning in the world! When I look heavenward, gaze towards the inaccessible light, and aspire after knowledge of God, I find my soul so dark and distant that I am ready to cry out, 'I do not know God; he is above me, quite out of my reach!' I know then that I would willingly exchange all my other knowledge for one glimpse of God and the life to come. Oh, that I had never known the words 'philosophy' or 'metaphysics', nor what the Schoolmen wrote, if I can possess one spark more of the light that will show me the things that I must behold shortly!

On my part, I believe that by a serious discussion of everlasting things, and teaching the creed (or some short catechism), we will grow more in knowledge. We may prove ignorant of many other things, but we will be much wiser than if we had spent our time in studying interesting yet less necessary things. Perhaps it will be found, before we have done, that this involvement in personal work makes us much better pastors for the Church than private study alone. The best and ablest physician or lawyer or theologian is the one who concentrates on practising what he has studied. A man is a useless drone when he refuses to do God's service all his life with the excuse that he is preparing to do it. Men's souls are passing on to perdition while he pretends to be studying how to recover them, or looks for more knowledge on how to save them.

(3) Yet let me say this, that although I count personal work as vitally important, I must add

this: if you study and do personal work, but make study a secondary activity, both activities will be very useful. So, I say to you, 'Arrange your time to do both.' You lose no time being involved with un-edifying recreations and unnecessary tasks. Do not eat into your time by sleeping too much, and do not trifle away a minute. Thus we follow wisdom - **'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might'**. (Ecclesiastes 9:10) See if you have any time left over to do anything else. If you set apart just two days a week for personal work, you will find some time for study in the other four. Indeed, are not four days in the week (after so many years in College) a fair proportion for studying and preparing sermons? Though my health deprives me of some of my time, and parish work takes up three-fifths to four-fifths of my time, yet I bless God that I find enough time to prepare for preaching two days a week, plus two days for personal work. Now, for those who are not burdened with extra work (I mean, writing, and ordinations of several kinds, besides the ordinary tasks of the ministry), I cannot believe that they cannot find two days a week to do personal work and instruction.

Duties should be looked at all together. The greatest is to be preferred, but none should to be neglected if possible. Each has its proper place. But if I had to make a choice between further studies and instructing the ignorant, I would throw away all the libraries in the world rather than be found guilty of the loss of one soul. This, at least, I know to be my duty.

OBJECTION 4:

But this personal counselling you suggest we take up will destroy our health by our spending our continual strength in it, and by allowing us no free time for recreation. It will destroy our social life so that we will never stir from home, nor enjoy a day with our friends to relax our minds. Others will consider us discourteous and moody. And we will surely wear ourselves out, for the bow that is kept taut is in danger of breaking before long.

ANSWER:

(1) This is a plea of the flesh in its own interest. **'The slothful man says, "There is a lion in the road!"'** (Proverbs 26:13), neither **'will the slothful man plough because of winter.'** (Proverbs 20:4) There is no duty of self-denial but, if you consult with flesh and blood, it will give you as many reasons against it as there are for. Who would ever have been burned at the stake for Christ if this reasoning held true? Indeed, whoever would have become a Christian?

(2) We can take time for needed recreation and yet do our work. An hour's, or half an hour's, walk before a meal is as much recreation that is needed for the health of most pastors. I have reason to know something of this through long experience. Although I have a body that has languished in great weakness for many years, my illnesses have required vigorous exercise which I found to be the chief means of my recovery. Therefore, I have as great a reason for pleading for it as anyone I know. Indeed, I do not know one minister in a hundred who needs more exercise than me. I know many pastors who hardly do any exercise at all, though I do not commend them for this. I do not doubt that it is our duty to do as much exercise as possible for our health's sake, and so far as our work allows. Otherwise, with too much exercise, we may lose the opportunity to do personal work. We can exercise yet get our work done also. On the two days a week that you set apart for personal work, what is there to stop you taking a walk for an hour or two to exercise your bodies? Perhaps you can do more on other days. There are those who do not keep their recreation to stated hours, but take it whenever the mood suits them. They refuse to fit it into their work schedule. Such pleasure seekers need to look more closely at the nature of Christianity, and learn the dangers of living after the flesh. They need to practise more mortification and self-denial before they preach these things to others. If you must have

your pleasures, you should not have taken up a calling that requires you to make God and his service your pleasure, and keeps you back from fleshly pleasures. Was it not your baptismal promise to fight against the flesh? And do you not know that much of the Christian warfare consists of a war between the flesh and the spirit?

Is not the difference between a true Christian and an unconverted one that the former lives after the spirit and mortifies the deeds and desires of the body, and the latter lives after the flesh? Because of your calling, do you not preach these things to others? Yet you still insist on your pleasures! If you must, then shamefully renounce your preaching of the gospel, and your profession of Christianity, and profess yourself to be what you really are: an unbeliever. Paul issues this warning – **‘For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.’** (Galatians 6:8) Paul says this of himself – **‘Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified’** (1 Corinthians 9:26-27) Do not such sinners as us need to say the same thing? What! Should we pamper our bodies, and give in to the desires of unnecessary pleasure, when Paul kept his body disciplined, and brought it into subjection? Did not Paul do this, lest, after all his preaching, he should become disqualified? And have we not more cause to fear this for ourselves? I know that some pleasures are lawful; that is, those that are useful for fitting us for the work. But, for a man to be so much in love with his pleasures that he wastes unnecessarily his precious time, and neglects the great work of men’s salvation, is a scandal. Such a one who tries to justify himself is too wicked, too inconsistent, too unfaithful to be a Christian, much less a minister of Christ. Such wretches are worldly **‘lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God’**. (2 Timothy 3:4) They should be cast out of the Christian community rather than be leaders of the Church. Paul adds: **‘And from such people turn away!’** (1 Timothy 3:5) Recreations are ideal for a student because they exercise his body, for he has such a variety of demanding thoughts in his mind. Such exercises are like the mower when he sharpens his scythe - that is, only so far as it is necessary for him to keep his blade sharp for the work. We must not allow recreation to rob us of our precious time, but keep it within limits.

(3) The work in which we are engaged is not likely to affect our health too much. It is true that it is serious work, but that should excite and revive our spirits, not wear them out. People talk all day long about other matters without harming their health; so why do we not talk to people about their salvation? It will not do our health any harm?

(4) What do we have our time and strength for, but to spend it for God? What is a candle for, but to burn? Like the candle, our lives must be used and burnt out. Is anything better than lighting sinners to heaven and working for God, rather than living for the flesh? What difference is there between the pleasure of a long or a short life when they both come to an end! What comfort will you have at your death when you know that your life was lengthened because you cut short your work? The one who works much will live a full life. Our life should be judged according to its objectives and works, not by its duration. As Seneca said of a drone, ‘There he lies, not there he lives; and long he abode, not long he lived.’ Will it not comfort us more at our death to judge that a short time spent faithfully is better than a long life spent without diligence?

(5) Now, with regard to visiting: if it is more urgent than our pastoral work on a Sunday, you may break the Sabbath. You may even put it before preaching, putting private work before public work. Thus, do not make your public duties an excuse for neglecting your personal work. Even when your friends call on your services, whether they are lords or knights or gentlemen, must not God’s service come first? Is their displeasure or criticism more hurtful to you than God’s displeasure or criticism? When God questions you for your

neglect of personal work, will you put him off with this excuse, 'Lord, I would like to have spent more of my time in seeking men's salvation; but such-and-such gentleman would have taken it badly if I had not gone to him immediately?' If you still '**seek to please men**' (Galatians 1:10), you are no longer servants of Christ. He who dares spend his time in the pleasures of the flesh and seeking to please men is bolder than I am! And the one who dares waste his time in compliments cannot see how petty it looks.

Oh, that I could use my time better under the conviction that I must improve it! Who can look death in the face, as I have done frequently, and not value his time highly? I confess that I wonder at those pastors who have the time to go out hunting or shooting or bowling, and resort to those recreations for two or three hours, sometimes whole days at a time. They will sit for an hour or two in idle chit chat, and spend whole days in social visits, making long journeys for such an end. From such, may the good Lord deliver us! What are these men thinking of when so many souls around them are crying for help, death affording them no respite, for they do not know how long it will be before death overtakes them? Even the smallest parish has enough work to call forth all their diligence day and night.

My brothers, I hope you are not too upset at me for speaking to you so plainly. If you have no sense of the worth of souls, and the preciousness of the blood that was shed for them, and the glory that lies ahead of them, and the misery of those who reject the gospel, you cannot be Christians, and, consequently, you are unfit to be pastors. And if you think deeply about these things, how can you find time for unnecessary recreations, social visits, and gossiping? Can you chat and trifle away your time when you have a great work ahead of you? O precious time! How swiftly does it pass! How soon it is gone! Where have the last forty years of my life gone? If every day were as long as a month, I think it would still be too short to do the work of the day. Have we not already wasted enough time on vanities? Never, when I attend a dying man who has lived an utterly stupid life, have I found that he does not value the time he has left. Oh, if they could only have their time over again, how happy they would be! If they could only buy it back, what price would they pay? And yet can we afford to trifle it away. No; we wilfully allow ourselves to throw away the opportunity to do great works for God.

Oh, what a foolish thing is sin that it can distract men who usually act so wisely! Is it possible for a man of any compassion and honesty, or any concern for his pastoral responsibilities, or any sense of the strictness of his account, to waste his time in idleness and empty pursuits? And I tell you further, my brothers, that even when others spend their time in unnecessary pleasure, that is no excuse for you to do the same. Your spiritual undertaking has bound you to a stricter regime than other men. May a physician, when an epidemic is raging, take any relaxation or recreation when so many are looking for his help where it might mean life or death? To him, his pleasure is not worth men's lives. Still less are your pleasures worth men's souls.

Suppose a city were under siege, with the enemy watching carefully, on one hand, looking for ways to surprise it, and, on the other hand, seeking to bombard it with grenades, which they are throwing continually. I beg you, tell me this: firemen spend their watch looking out for fires that could break out in the houses. What time do you suppose these men can spare in recreation or relaxation when the city could be in danger, and the houses might catch fire and burn up? They cannot afford to let down their guard. Or would you excuse any one of these firemen if he says in his work, 'I am only flesh and blood. I must have some relaxation and pleasure?' At the least, you would only allow him what was absolutely necessary. Do not grumble at me and say, '**This is a hard saying; who can understand it?**' (John 6:60) I am saying these things for your good. You are well if you know that you are well, as I will show you when I answer the next objection.

OBJECTION 5:

I do not believe pastors are required to make themselves drudges [those who do menial, dull, distasteful, hard work]. If they preach diligently, and visit the sick, and perform other pastoral duties, and occasionally look to the welfare of those they meet, I do not think that God wants us to instruct every person regularly, and make our lives a burden and a misery.

ANSWER

The use and importance of the duty I proved earlier, so how much clearer can I make the command? Do you question whether God wants you to do all the good you can? Will you stand by and see sinners gasping under the pangs of death and say, 'God does not want me to make myself a drudge to save them?' Is this the voice of Christian or pastoral compassion? Rather, it is the voice of sheer laziness and diabolical cruelty. When God gives you work to do, are you questioning that he wants you to do it? Is this the voice of obedience or rebellion? It is a terrible thing to let your flesh so prevail with you that you deny obedience to acknowledged duty, saying, 'I will obey no further than it pleases me.' How can you reject the evidence that should convince you that personal work is a duty? Do I hear you say, 'I will not believe it is my duty unless I see it this way.' It is characteristic of a hypocrite to make religion serve his own purposes, and use the cheapest part of God's service to suit his fleshly desires and happiness, and then reject the rest. This is inconsistent. And to the words of hypocrisy, this objection adds further words of gross unfaithfulness.

What wretched rebellion is this against the most-high God, to call his service slavery and drudgery! What other thoughts have such men of their Master, their work, and their wages? Are they the thoughts of a Christian or the thoughts of an unbeliever? Can these men honour God and promote his service when they have such corrupt thoughts about his service? Can these men delight in holiness when they call his work 'slavish'? Are they sincere in their belief concerning the misery of sinners when they count it such a drudgery to go out of their way to save them? Christ declared that **'Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.'** (Mark 8:34) But these men count it slavery to labour hard in the vineyard and deny their leisure, at a time when they have so much success and encouragement. How far this is from the words of the Lord Jesus – **'So likewise, whoever, of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple.'** (Luke 14:33) How can these men be fit for the ministry when they are such enemies of self-denial, and so then of true Christianity? Therefore, I am bound to say that from this has come the main reason for the misery of the Church, when so many pastors were ordained before they became Christians. Have these men read of the diligence of Christ when he set aside his meal in order to talk to a woman, and told his disciples that he had no time to eat? (See John 4) Would they echo the same words as his own worldly-minded people, when they took hold of him and complained of his over-working with these words, **'He is out of his mind'**? (Mark 3:21) Would they have told Christ that he was making himself a drudge or a slave, and that God did not require it of him? If they had seen him all day in preaching, and all night in prayer, it seems he might have earned this censure for his overworking.

I can do nothing but advise these men to search their own hearts whether they really believe the Word that they preach. Do you believe in the glory that awaits you when you die in the Lord, and do you believe in the torment that awaits all the unconverted when they die? If you do, how can you think that any labour is too great for such important issues? If you do not think this, say so and get out of the vineyard, and go with the

prodigal to keep swine! But do not try to feed the flock of Christ. My brothers, do you not perceive that you are grumbling at your own blessings? The more you give, the more you will receive; the more you spend, the more you will come in. If you are strangers to these Christian paradoxes, you should not have promised to teach them to others.

At present, our spiritual life and peace comes by way of duty, so that the one who is most diligent in duty has the most of God. In doing our duty, our grace increases. Anyway, is it slavery to be close to God, and to receive more from him than others? It is the main solace of a gracious soul to be gracious to others, and thereby receiving blessings. How much divine things should grip our hearts! Besides, we are preparing for an extra increase in times to come. We are putting our talents out for interest, and, by improving them, we will make five become ten, and so be made rulers of ten cities. (Luke 19:17) Is it drudgery to go to the most distant parts of the world to exchange our trifles for gold and jewels? Do not men seek to justify profane things when they label diligent godliness a drudgery, and reproach it as a limitation on their life, and say they will never believe a man needs to be saved with all this fuss and ado? This is what they say of the work of the ministry. They take diligence to be unwelcome tedium, and refuse to believe that a man can only be a faithful pastor if he is faithful in fulfilling all his responsibilities.

It is a terrible sin to be negligent in so important a business. But to approve of that negligence, and to be so hard-hearted as to treat duty as if it were not a duty, is unbelievable. This is what they say: 'I should not be spending all my time in saving souls because I do not believe that God requires it of me.' That is a blatant sin. Why does the church have to do with such men? I think they are only fit to be cast out as rubbish, as our Lord said - **'You are the salt of the earth; but if he salt loses its taste, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.'** (Matthew 5:13) And if such pastors become a byword and a reproach, let them thank themselves for it, for it is their own sin that makes them vile. And while they debase the service of Christ, they also debase themselves, and prepare for a greater debasement at the Last Judgement.

OBJECTION 6:

In the time that Paul lived, a diligence greater than ours was needed. The churches were just being planted, the enemies were many, and persecution was great. But it is not so now.

ANSWER:

This argument sounds as if it came from a man locked up in his study, and ignorant of the world! Good Lord, how can you bear it! Are there not multitudes around us who do not know whether Christ is God or man, or whether he ascended to heaven taking his body there or leaving it behind? They know nothing of what Christ accomplished for their salvation, or what they must trust in for the forgiveness of sin and everlasting life? Are there not thousands around us who are complacent, secure, and living for pleasure, and, when we have done all that we can in the pulpit, they neither accept our teaching nor care to understand us? Are there not many wilful drunkards, worldlings, self-seekers, rabble-rousers, and haters of the holy life? Will they not, after death, be cut off forever? **'He who is often reprov'd, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.'** (Proverbs 29:1) Are there not many ignorant, dull and scandalous professed Christians, who divide, seduce, and trouble the Church? And is the happiness of our times so great that we may excuse ourselves from personal work because the times are less desperate than they used to be?

ANSWER:

What do we need more than our own faith and experience to answer this objection? Have a stronger faith within, and look outside more to the miserable, and I guarantee you will not be spared the pains of necessary personal work, which I am urging you to take up! What conscientious minister cannot find enough work to do from one year's end to another, even if he has only a hundred souls to care for? In any case, to answer the objection, are ungodly men less miserable because they have made a profession of Christianity. They are probably more miserable!

OBJECTION 7:

If you lay down such severe rules for pastors, the Church will be left without them. For why in his right mind would a man choose such a troublesome life? Or what parents would put such a burden on their children? Men should avoid it both for its bodily demands and the danger to their consciences if they are not able to discharge it well.

ANSWER:

(1) It is not we, but Christ, who makes and insists on the rules you describe as severe. Even if I have misinterpreted them, that would not relax them nor excuse you. The One who made them knows why he made them, and he expects us to be obedient. Is infinite goodness to be questioned or criticised by us for making what we consider bad or unmerciful laws? No! It is in his pure mercy that he has imposed these responsibilities upon us. If physicians are required to be as diligent as possible in hospitals or nursing homes in order to save the lives of their patients, would they not show more mercy than the law demanded? What! Must God let the souls of your neighbours perish to save you a little inconvenience and suffering, and that out of mercy for you! Oh, what a miserable world we live in when blind, self-conceited men rule over it!

(2) As for the supply of pastors, let Christ take care of that. He who imposes the duty has the fullness of the Spirit, and will give men the heart to obey his rules. Do you think that Christ will allow all men to be as cruel, unmerciful, worldly, and self-seeking as you are? He who undertook the work of our redemption, and bore our transgressions - the faithful Chief Shepherd of the Church - will not lose the effects of his suffering and work for lack of instruments to carry it on. Nor will he come down again to do it himself because there is no one else will do it. He will send men to be his servants and teachers for his school who will willingly take up the work, rejoice in their tasks, and count it the happiest life in the world even though it demands great toil. They would not exchange it for any leisure activity or worldly pleasure. For the sake of saving souls, and the preaching of the gospel of Christ, they are content to bear **'the burden and he heat of the day'**. (Matthew 20:12) They are happy to repeat the words of Paul - **'I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of his body, which is his church.'** (Colossians 1:24)

(3) So let them work while it is day (see John 9:4), and do whatever they can with all their might. They are the servants of all, not pleasing themselves but others, for their edification. They become all things to all men that they may save some. (See 1 Corinthians 9:22) They endure all things for the elect's sake. They spend and are spent for their fellow-creatures, when the more they love, the less they will be loved, and be counted as enemies for telling them the truth. Such are the pastors Christ sends to his people, shepherds after his own heart who feed them with knowledge and understanding. (See Jeremiah 3:15). They are men who will not seek their own purposes, but his purpose. What! Do you think Christ will have no servants, if you, like Demas, turn to the present

world and forsake him? (See 2 Timothy 4:10) If you dislike his service, you can always seek a better one – if you can find it - and boast of your gain in due time. But do not threaten him with the loss of your service. He made such rules that you call 'severe' for those who will be saved, as well as for his pastors.

(4) All who desire to be his disciples must deny themselves, mortify their flesh, be crucified to the world, and take up their cross and follow him. Christ will not be without disciples, nor will he conceal his seemingly hard terms from men to entice them into his service. He will tell them the worst from the beginning, and then let them come or not, as they choose. He will call on them beforehand to count the cost, and tell them that **'foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.'** (Matthew 8:20) He has not come to give them peace in this world and prosperity. He gives them these promises – **'For if we died with him, we shall also live with him. If we endure, we shall also reign with him'** (2 Timothy 2:12), and, **'To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne'**. (Revelation 3:21)

Christ will help all his chosen servants to perform his service. They will not come before Christ as the rebellious Israelites did before David, and say, **'We have no part in David, nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!'** (2 Samuel 20:1) They pray, 'Now look to your own house, O Son of David', and they will see that Christ looks after his own house. So look to yours as best you can, and you will tell me at the hour of death and judgement which is the better bargain, and whether Christ had more need of you than you had of him.

As for scruples of conscience over fear of failure, let me say this:

Firstly, it is not our natural weaknesses that Christ is concerned with; it is our unfaithfulness and wilful disobedience.

Secondly, it is ridiculous to run out of the vineyard because we do not think we can do the work well enough. If you are remiss, he will follow you as he did Jonah, and overtake you with such a storm that it will lay you low, as it were, in the bowels of hell. To neglect a duty because you think that you will fail in the performance of it will prove to be a poor excuse at the last. All these objections could be solved easily if we first reckon up the difference between things temporal and eternal and what we would lose or gain by following Christ. Let us, then, possess by faith what is **'the evidence of things not seen'** (Hebrews 11:1), and **'walk by faith and not sight.'** (2 Corinthians 5:7) All the pleas of flesh and blood for its own interest will then appear like the reasoning of a small child rather than men that have lost their senses!

OBJECTION 8:

For what purpose is all this personal work when most people will not submit to our instruction? They will not come to us to be catechised, and they tell us that they are too old to go back to school. So would it not be better to leave them alone rather than trouble them and us for nothing.

ANSWER:

(1) It cannot be denied that too many people are obstinate in their wickedness. The wise man declares - **'How long you simples ones, will you love simplicity? For scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge.'** (Proverbs 1:22) But the worse they get, the sadder their case becomes; and the more we should pity them. It is a waste of time to strive for their recovery.

(2) I wish I could not blame the pastors for the fact that most people are so obstinate and contemptuous. We could have accomplished more if only we had burned and shone in front of them as we ought, and had matched our convincing sermons with our convincing lives! If only we had set our hands to do all the good we could at whatever the cost, and had been more humble, more loving, and more charitable, and had let the people see that that all worldly things are nothing compared with their salvation! Then the mouths of many would have been closed; and though the wicked would have gone on doing wickedly, they would have been more manageable. They would also have been fewer and more peaceful. If you say that some of the ablest and godliest pastors in the country have had to put up with as unruly and scornful parishioners as others, I would reply that some fine and godly men have been too high-and-mighty, and too distant from their people. Others have been too uncharitable and worldly in the performance of their duties. Some pastors were hindered through lack of personal work, and so lost the fruit of their labour, although they did well in their public preaching. But when these hindrances are set aside, experience tells us that success is real, at least so far as the calmness and teachability of the people is concerned. Do not expect all your people to be brought to their senses.

(3) The wilfulness of the people is no excuse for neglecting our duty. If we do not offer help to them, how do we know those who will refuse it? Offering the gospel is our responsibility, and accepting the gospel is theirs. If we do not offer the gospel, we leave them with an excuse, for then they plead that they would not have refused! But we have no excuse. If they refuse our help when we offer it, we will have fulfilled our responsibilities and delivered our own souls.

(4) If some refuse our help, you will go to others who will accept it. Success with others will be a great reward for our labour, and we will want to do more. Not all our people are affected by our public preaching, but we must not stop preaching on this account.

OBJECTION 9:

But what likelihood is there that men will be converted through personal work when they are not converted through the preaching of the Word, which, after all, is God's main method for that end, for '**faith comes by hearing, and hearing by [the preaching of] the word of God.**' (Romans 10:19)

ANSWER:

(1) I have spoken of the advantages of taking up personal work, so I will not repeat them here. In case anyone thinks that it will hinder him from preaching, I will add this to the many benefits I mentioned earlier: it is an excellent means of helping you to preach effectively. The physician's work is half-done when he understands the disease. So, when you know your people well, you will know what to preach about. Personal work will provide you with some very useful material for your sermons. Talking for an hour with an ignorant or obstinate sinner is as good as an hour's study at home, for you will learn what you need to say, and what objections there are to the gospel.

(2) I hope there are none so stupid here who think that personal work is not preaching. What! Do those to whom we are speaking know that we are? Is not what we say in personal work preaching? Surely a pastor can just as well preach to one as to a thousand. And, as we have already said, if you look in the Bible carefully, you will find that most of the preaching recorded in the New Testament came about personally as the opportunity arose, and was frequently a response to questions. That is how Christ himself did his preaching. Besides, we must take into account what our people know if we are going to be

successful in the work.

There is nothing from God or from Scripture or from reason that should make us question our work, or be unwilling to face it. But from the world, the flesh, and the devil comes great opposition - perhaps more than we expect. However, there is no reason to draw back, or faint in the face of difficulties, if we look to God, and remind ourselves, on the one hand, of our great responsibilities, and, on the other, of the hopeful results and blessed rewards of personal work.

SECTION 3

ACTS 20: PAUL'S SPEECH TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS AT MILETUS

Let us look now for the pattern of our text, and, from it, see how we should set about our task. Oh, what a lesson lies before us here! But how few learn it, preferring to question whether these things are their responsibility. I confess that the words of Paul so often catch my eye, and impress themselves on my conscience, that they have often convict me of my neglect. And I think this one speech deserves twelve month's study, more than most books young pastors waste their time on. O my brothers, write these words on the door of your studies! Put them at the top of your sermons in capital letters that they might ever be before your eyes! If we learned only two or three lines of it, what preachers we would turn out to be!

Our business in general: '**... serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials**' (19)

Our special work: '**... take heed to yourselves and to all the flock**'. (18)

The content of our teaching: '**... repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ**.' (21)

The location and style of our teaching: '**I taught you publicly and from house to house**.' (20)

Paul's diligence, earnestness, and affection: '**I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears**.' (31)

Paul's faithfulness: '**I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you ... For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God**.' (20, 27)

Paul's dedication and self-denial for the sake of the gospel: '**I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me ... And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."**' (33-35)

Paul's patience and perseverance: '**But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus**' (24)

Paul's prayerfulness: '**I commend you to God and to the word of his grace which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified**.' (32)

Paul's purity of conscience: '**Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men**.' (26)

So then, write all these things on your hearts. They will do you and the Church more good than twenty years of studying more inferior things. Book learning may obtain for you greater fame in the world, but it will make you as '**sounding brass or a clanging cymbal**'. (1 Corinthians 13:1)

The great advantages of pastors who have a sincere heart are these: the glory of God, and the salvation of souls. Both should be their passion. And where this end is truly

intended, no labour or suffering will hinder them, or turn them back; for a man must achieve his purpose, whatever the cost. He may forget many things, but he will remember this lesson – ONE THING IS NEEDED - **'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness'**. (Matthew 6:33) That is why Paul said, **'... necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!'** (1 Corinthians 9:16) This inevitably eases all our labours, lightens all our burdens, and makes tolerable all our sufferings, causing us take any risks when desiring to win souls for Christ. What I once made the motto of my company colours in another war I retain to this day. On one side you will find these words: 'He who saves his life shall lose it', and on the other: 'Do not ruin the cause for the sake of holding back one's life'. A servant of the Lord knows for a certainty that he will never be allowed to be a loser, and need fear no risk while he is pursuing his cause. The one who knows that he is seeking a prize that, once obtained, will infinitely exceed the cost, will boldly risk his whole estate on it, and sell all to purchase so rich a pearl. (See Matthew 13:45-46)

Well, dear brothers, I will spend no more words in exhorting wise merchants to grab such a bargain, nor tell teachers what they already know. And if I have already said more than I should, well, I am glad of it! I hope I may now take it for granted that you have decided to pursue personal work with your utmost diligence and faithfulness. And on this supposition, I shall now go on to give you some directions on how to conduct yourselves in the work.

SECTION 4

DIRECTIONS FOR PERSONAL WORK

So great is the work that lies before us, that it is a thousand pities it should be strangled at birth and perish at our hands! I know that we are dealing with a difficult generation, and it is past the power of any of us to change a hardened heart without the effective working of the Holy Spirit. But God normally uses means to accomplish his work, and blesses the sincere endeavours of his servants. I believe that great things are about to happen, and a wonderful blow is to be given to the kingdom of darkness in this work if it is not to be spoilt at the hands of the pastors themselves. The main danger arises from lack of diligence or skill. Concerning the former, I have said too much already. Concerning the latter, I am very conscious of my own lack of skills, so I am far from thinking that I am fit to give directions to any but the younger and more inexperienced pastors. Therefore, please grant me your indulgence, and imagine that I am speaking only to young pastors. Yet I will not pass over in silence you older pastors because your number here is quite large. I believe that the welfare of our Church and nation depends very much on the right management of our personal work.

The points you need to be very careful about are twofold:

1. To encourage your people to submit to private and personal catechising and counselling; for if they will not come to you, or permit you to come to them, what good can we do them?
2. To do the work in such a way that it will bring success.

ARTICLE 1

ON SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING IN GENERAL

Now, let me first give you some directions to encourage your people to agree to catechising and counselling.

The example of the Pastor

The first thing is for the pastor to be a good example through his life and ministry, so that he will be able to convince his people of his ability, sincerity, and sincere love for them. Otherwise, they will treat him as an ignorant man, despise his teachings, and think they are as wise as he is. If they think he is self-seeking, or hypocritical, or someone that does not mean what he says, they will suspect his words and all that he does for them, and will not respect him. However, if they are convinced that he knows what he is doing, and have a high estimate of his abilities, they will respect him and accept his advice more willingly. When they know of his uprightness, they will not suspect his motives; and when they see that he is not doing anything for his own ends, but just for their good, they will accept him readily. And because those to whom I am addressing these words are not too expert in the ministry, and may despair of ever being respected by their people, I would say to them, 'You must work out ways and means of meeting their needs. And what you lack in ability, you can make up with other qualifications. Then your advice will be as successful as that of others.

Pastors should be more willing to purchase an interest in the affections of their people at the cost of their own flesh, condescend to be familiar with them, be affectionate and wise in giving advice, and be generous according to their ability. Then they will do far more for their people. We should not show an interest in them for our own sake, but be keen to promote the interests of Christ and further their salvation. If we did this for their sakes alone, it would not matter whether they loved us or not - even hated us. But what commander can do anything with an army that hates him? And why do we think they will respect our counsel when they despise and disregard any other pastor who offers them advice? So work hard to win the affection of your people, and then you will do better with them.

Perhaps someone is asking, 'What should a pastor do when he finds that he has lost the affection of his people?' To this, I reply, 'Some of them are so vile that they hate him, not for any weakness or misconduct of his, but merely because he is concerned for their welfare. And some of them hate anyone else who follows the same procedure. What is he to do? He must, with patience and humility, continue in his course of **'correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil'**. (2 Timothy 2:25-26) Now, if his people are prejudiced against him on account of any weakness, or difference about less important matters, or prejudice against him, let him first try to remove the prejudice by every possible means. And if he is not successful, let him say to them, 'It is not for me, but for you that I labour. Therefore, seeing that you will not obey the word from me, let me pass you on to someone else, that he may do for you what I cannot do.' Then leave them, and see whether a better man can be found for them. A sincere man can hardly stay with a people against their will, neither an honest nor a humble man. For when he cannot bring any under the Word, he cannot stay where he is likely to be unprofitable, for he might undo the good they might receive from another pastor who can receive greater interest in their affection and esteem.

The importance of preaching

After this general preparation, the next thing to be done is to make use of the most effective ways of convincing them of the benefit of your personal work to their souls. The way to win the consent of people to anything that you propose is to prove that it is good and profitable for them. You must therefore preach to them some powerful, convincing sermons, and show them the benefit and necessity of the knowledge of divine truth both generally, and according to first principles. You must show them that the elderly have the same need as others, and, in some respects, much more - **'For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and have come to need milk and not of solid food.'** (Hebrews 5:12) This verse tells us several things:

(1) God's oracles will teach us what we need to know.

(2) Pastors must teach these truths, and the people must learn from them.

(3) The oracles of God contain fundamental principles that must be made known to all that desire to be saved.

(4) These principles must be learned in the right order.

(5) It can be assumed that people will grow in their knowledge, depending on who is teaching them. If they do not grow, that is a great sin.

(6) If any have long been under the preaching of the Word, and yet are ignorant of the first principles, they must be taught again, whoever they are.

All this is clearly seen in our text. What then should we teach our people?

Firstly, they need to know the oracles of God.

Secondly, and very importantly, they need to know the fundamental principles.

Thirdly, many that are elderly have already sinfully lost too much time, when long ago they promised to repent. They ought by now to be teachers of the young, but their ignorance is a double sin and a shame. They now have little time left in which to learn, for they are nearer death and judgement. They have souls to save or lose, just like the others.

Convince your people how impossible it is to go to heaven without a saving knowledge, for there are many difficulties and enemies in the way. Just as people cannot go about their worldly business without knowledge, nor learn a trade without an apprenticeship, how can they be Christians without learning what it means to be a Christian? Convince them what a contradiction it is to be a Christian yet are unwilling to learn; for what is a Christian but a disciple (learner) of Christ? How can they be Christ's disciples when they refuse to be taught by him? Those who refuse to be taught by the pastor are unwilling to be taught by him; for Christ will not return from heaven to teach them with his own mouth. He has appointed his pastors to keep school, and teach under him. To say they refuse to be taught by the pastor is to refuse to be taught by Christ himself; that is to say they are no disciples of his, and are therefore not Christians.

Make them understand that what you are doing is not something you have made up. Necessity is laid upon you (1 Corinthians 9:16); and that if you do not look after every member of the flock as much as possible, they will perish in their iniquity, and their blood

will be required at your hand. Show them that it is God, not you, who is the origin and author of the work, and that they bring more shame on God than you in rejecting the work. Ask them if they would be so cruel to their pastor as to wish him to lose his own soul, and to do so knowingly and wilfully because they know that he is only trying to prevent their condemnation?

Teach them fully the nature of pastoral work, and how the Church needs it. Tell them how it involves the teaching and guiding of all the flock; and that, just as they come to church like students to school, so they must give an account of what they have learnt, and that in the context of personal work. Explain to them how this will lead to their salvation, and how it will bring an improvement to their life, and how much easier it will be to combat sin and evil. Suddenly, they will discover that it is for their own good, and they will more easily yield to it.

The use of a catechism

When a friendlier atmosphere comes about, you will need to provide a catechism to every family in the parish whether rich or poor, so that they will be without excuse. If you leave it to them, perhaps only half will buy a copy, and the other half will forget to get one. When they have a copy put into their hands, it is an incentive to learn them. And if they only read the opening exhortation (and it is likely that they will), it will possibly convince them to join in the exercise. As for the delivery of the catechisms: the best way is for the minister to give notice to the congregation that he will bring them to their homes, and then let him go from house to house to deliver them, and take the opportunity to persuade his people to study. As he goes round, let him make a list of all those who have come to the years of discretion in each family that he may know exactly who to instruct. In former years, when I wanted to distribute other books to my people, I asked every family to call for them. But I found this led to confusion. So I have now adopted a better method. But in small congregations, either way will do.

As for the expense of the catechisms: if the minister is able to bear the cost, well and good. If not, ask some of the best members of the flock, the richer families, to pay for them. Or, on a day of prayer to prepare for the work, let a collection be taken up for the purchase of the catechisms. You will find that people will give more generously than usual. As for the order of the proceedings: you will need to take the people in order, family by family, beginning a month or six weeks after the delivery of the catechisms, that they may have time to learn them. And thus, taking families together, they will be all the more willing to come, and the shy ones will be too ashamed to stay.

Practicalities

Be sure to deal gently with them, and shrug off all disappointments as well as you can.

(1) Tell them publicly that if they have learned any other catechism already, you will not expect them to learn a new one unless they want to; for the substance of all orthodox catechisms is the same. Tell them that the only reason for offering them was that they are short, and this will make the work easier. If any of them would rather learn some other catechism, let them take their choice.

(2) As for older people who are not expected to live much longer, who have poor memories, and are always complaining that they cannot remember the words: tell them not to worry too much about it. Read the words often to them, and see that they understand them. Get the substance into their minds and hearts, though they may not remember the exact words.

(3) Let your dealings with those you are counselling be gentle, convincing, and winning, so a good report will encourage others to come forward.

The need for counselling

Lastly, if all this does not touch certain people, do not cast them off, but go and discuss it with them. Learn what their reasons are, and convince them of the sinfulness and danger of neglecting the help that is being offered them. A soul is so precious that we should not lose one for lack of effort. Visit them while there is yet hope, and do not give them up as desperate till they are beyond remedy. Before we give them up, let us try our utmost to overcome their obstinacy before we forsake them. **'Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.'** (1 Corinthians 13:7)

ARTICLE 2

ON SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING IN PARTICULAR

Having used all means to induce your people to come and submit to your instruction, let us now consider how you can deal most effectively with them in the work. And again, I must repeat that it is easier to prepare and preach a good sermon than to instruct an ignorant man effectively in the essential principles of the faith. Personal work is despised and avoided by some pastors; but I tell you, it tests the gifts and graces of pastors, and highlights the difference between one man and another, much more than preaching does. And here, to prove my point, I read the words of Archbishop James Ussher, a most learned, orthodox, and godly man, in his sermon before King James at Wanstead on Ephesians 4.13:

'Your Majesty's concern can never be sufficiently commended, in ordering that the chief headings of the catechism should, in the normal ministry, be diligently pointed out and explained to the people throughout the land. I wish that your order were as duly executed everywhere as you piously intended it. Great scholars may think that it does them no credit to stoop so low, and to spend so much of their time in teaching these rudiments and first principles of the doctrine of Christ. But they should consider the skilful laying of the foundation, as this is the greatest part of the whole building, and is the very masterpiece of the great edifice. **'According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation'** (1 Corinthians 3:10), said the great apostle. So let the most scholarly of us try to keep to this, and lay the groundwork first (that is, adapt ourselves to the capacity of our hearers, and make an ignorant man understand these mysteries in some depth). This will test our skills, and trouble us a great deal more than in discussing a controversy, or handling a subtle point of learning in the theological schools. Yet Christ gave as well his apostles and prophets and evangelists his ordinary pastors and teachers to bring us all, both learned and unlearned, to the unity of faith and knowledge. The neglect of this is frustrating the whole work of the ministry. So let us preach no more extra sermons to the people while our labour is lost because we have left the foundations unlaied, and the first principles untaught, things on which all other doctrines are founded.'

The directions that I think are necessary for the right management of the work are as follows:

Be friendly and encouraging

1. When your people come to you, probably in families, begin with a brief word of

encouragement to settle their minds, and take away any offence or reluctance. This will prepare them for your instruction.

'My friends', you could say, 'it might seem an unusual and a troublesome business that I am putting before you. But I hope you will soon see the point of it, for if I had thought so, I would have spared both you and me this task. But my conscience has informed me - indeed, God has solemnly told me in his Word - what it means to have the charge of souls, and how the blood of those who perish will be required at the hands of a minister who neglects them. Of that, I dare not be found guilty. Alas! How few see that our aim in this life is to arrive safely in heaven. For that purpose, God has appointed us to be guides to his people, and help them to get there. If this is done well, our people will be saved; and if this is left undone, our people will be undone forever. The Lord knows how brief a time you and I have together. Therefore, we must do what we can for your salvation and mine before we leave you, or you leave this world. All other business is but a plaything or a dream in comparison with this. The labours of our calling are only to prop up a house of clay while our souls are hastening towards death and judgement (which may, even now, be close at hand). I hope you will be glad of our help, and not think it too much trouble; for the trifles of the world are often considered more attractive.'

This, or something like it, should make them more willing to listen to you and receive instruction, and also give you some insight into their knowledge and Christian practice.

Conversation

When you have spoken to them as a whole, take them one by one and deal with them as far as possible in private, out of the earshot of the rest. Some find it hard to speak freely before others, and some cannot bear to be questioned in front of others because they think that it will make them feel ashamed when others hear their answers. Indeed, some people give better answers on their own when the rest have left, and talk freely about what they think and feel. Fewer people, then, will be discouraged; and those that are shy will have little excuse to fall back and say, 'I did not come to be laughed at.' You must be very careful to forestall all these objections. However, I have found by experience that people will talk more freely about their sins and misery and failure when you see them alone. Personal counselling is the best time to sow the truth in their hearts, and to deal freely with their consciences. If, then, you find another room, ask the rest to stay in one while you confer with each person individually in another. But in order to avoid a scandal, speak to the women only in the presence of someone else. There is no other way of doing it profitably. Do not give an excuse for criticism or malice, which could destroy the work. If someone else is in the room with you, speak in a low voice so that he cannot hear the conversation. So keep that person as far away as possible; or, at least, make sure that he belongs to the same family so that there will be no grounds for reproach. And then, in your most searching examinations and reproofs, deal carefully with the ignorant, insecure, and vicious, so that you will have clear grounds for speaking so personally. This may awaken some to the fact that personal work is a serious business. These small matters deserve attention because they belong to a work that is not small; and small errors may hinder a great deal of good.

Learning the catechism

Begin your work by finding out how much they have learned from the catechism. Take note of their answers to each question. And if they are able to repeat only a little, or none at all, see that they can say the Creed or the Ten Commandments.

Questions on the catechism

Then choose some of the more important points, and try, by further questioning, to see how much they understand them. Take care over the following things:

(1) That you do not begin with minor points but with those they see as important to themselves. For example:

What do you think happens to us when we die?
What do you think will happen to us at the end of the world?
Do you believe that you are a sinner?
Were you born with sin?
What does every sinner deserve?
What remedy has God provided for the salvation of sinful, miserable souls?
Has anyone suffered for our sins in our place?
Must we suffer for them ourselves?
Who will God forgive?
Who will be saved through the blood of Christ?
What changes occur in those that are saved?
How does this change come about?
What is our chief happiness?
What should a Christian set his heart on?

And you can ask many other questions similar to these.

(2) Beware of asking them obscure or doubtful or difficult questions. Restrict yourselves to those matters that are of the greatest importance. Some self-conceited pastors busy themselves with silly questions that they themselves cannot answer. Yet they are critical of the poor people who cannot answer them, as if their lives and deaths depended on their answers.

Perhaps you might ask them, 'Who is God?' Well, you too are capable of giving an inadequate response! You may say that what he is far better than what he does.

If you ask, 'What is repentance? What is faith? What is forgiveness of sins?' think of how many pastors would you have to ask before you got a correct answer, or else they disagree about certain things!

Likewise, you might ask them, 'What is regeneration, and what is sanctification?' You could ask, 'If men do not know what God is, and what repentance is, and what faith is, and what conversion is, what justification is, and what sanctification is, how can they be true Christians, and be saved?' I must say that it is one thing to know what the answers are, but it is another thing to know them in practice. The very names are difficult to examine, and they may hesitate in giving you a definition; but they may know in practice and by experience what they mean when they cannot tell you in scholarly words. They know what it is to repent, to believe, and to be forgiven, because they know them by experience. They may, perhaps, put you off with the usual answer: 'To repent is to repent; and to be forgiven is to be forgiven.' Or, if they reply, 'My sins are pardoned', that is a fair answer. Now, if I cannot dissuade you from putting such questions to them, ask them simply, when you suspect some great ignorance on the point, especially when it concerns God himself.

(2) So ask questions they can understand. It is not neat definitions that we are looking for, but their experience. Never ask question that require just a bare 'Yes' or 'No'. Do not

accept answers that are obviously taken from your own sermons.

Here are some good questions to ask. Try them out:

What is God?

Is he made of flesh and blood as we are, or is he an invisible Spirit?

Is he a man, or is he not?

Did he have a beginning?

Can he die?

What is faith?

Should we believe everything in the Word of God?

What does it mean to believe in Christ?

To become a true Christian, is it vital to believe that Christ is the Saviour of sinners?

Have you trusted in him as your Saviour to forgive, sanctify, govern, and glorify you?

What is the meaning of repentance?

Is it only to be sorry for sin, or is it to change our attitude towards God.

What does it mean to forsake sin?

Does repentance include both?

(3) When you see that they do not understand the meaning of your questions, draw out their answer by further questions as a way of explanation. Or, if that will not do, you must hint at the answer in your question, and then accept a reply that is just 'Yes' or 'No'. I have often asked ignorant people, 'How do you think that your many and great sins can be forgiven?' They tell me, 'By repenting, and reforming our lives,' with not so much as a mention of Jesus Christ. So ask them further, 'But do you think that your reformation of life can offer God any amends or satisfaction for your sins in the past.' They might answer, 'We hope so, or else we know nothing else that will'.

Now, one might think that these people had no knowledge of Christ at all, since they made no mention of him in their answers. Yes, it is true that some have no knowledge of him; and when I tell them of Christ, and what he is, and what he did and suffered, they stand wondering as though it was a strange thing. Some might say that they had never heard of this before, or knew about it, though they come to church every Lord's Day. But others, I believe, give such answers because they misunderstand the point of my question, and suppose that we must take Christ's death for granted. I have only to ask them, 'What will provide God's satisfaction for them? Is it Christ?', and they will answer, 'Yes'. However, by this omission, they reveal a sad ignorance of the truth. And when I ask them, 'Do you think that your good deeds merit anything from God?' they answer, 'No; but we hope that God will accept us.' And if I ask further, 'Can you be saved without the death of Christ?' they might answer, 'No.' Then I ask further, 'What has he done or suffered for you?' and they say, 'He died for us', or 'he shed his blood for us'. That is where they place their confidence for their salvation.

Many people are turning over in their minds what is not yet ready for utterance. Through an imperfect education and lack of study they are strangers to an expression of those things for which they have, as yet, no words. And, by the way, you may see here a reason why you should deal very tenderly with the common people. If they are teachable and docile, and are willing to make use of your personal work, what more need we ask. Many godly persons in the old days, could not express themselves properly, and were slow to learn even when expressions were put in their mouths. Some of the most pious and experienced Christians that I know (usually elderly people) complain to me with tears in their eyes that they cannot learn the words of the catechism. I consider instead the character of these inarticulate believers, and how they have enjoyed such excellent preaching in the best of Christian company for forty, fifty, or sixty years. I am therefore

forewarned as to what to expect from poor ignorant people who have never known such company, or heard such preaching, for longer than a week, or perhaps a year. So do not dismiss these people too hastily as some hot and haughty pastors advise us to do.

(5) If you find them at a loss, and unable to answer your questions, do not drive them too hard or too long with question after question. They will think that you only want to puzzle them and disgrace them. But when you see that they cannot answer, ease off the questioning, take the burden off them, and answer the question yourself. Do it thoroughly and simply, and give a full explanation of the truth to them, that, by your teaching, they may be brought to understand the subject before they leave you, or you leave them. Thus, start at the beginning, and go over everything in order till you arrive at the point of the question.

Practical application

When you are satisfied with their knowledge, go on to the next question to instruct them further according to their capacity. If you find a believer who understands the fundamental principles of the faith, look out for something that will reveal to him his greatest need. Either explain further something of the mysteries of the gospel, or lay the ground for some duty that he is doubtful about, showing him what he is neglecting, or pointing out his sins or mistakes – whatever is the most convincing and edifying to him. If, on the other hand, it is someone who is very ignorant, give him a simple recital of the sum of the Christian faith in a few words. Although it is in the catechism already, a more informal explanation may help him to understand it better. Say something like this:

'You must know that from everlasting there was one God who has no beginning and will have no end, who does not have a body as we do, but is a most pure and spiritual Being. He knows all things, and can do all things. He possesses all goodness and blessedness in himself. This God is One, but he exists in three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - in a way that is above our understanding. And you must also know that this one God made all the worlds by his Word. He made the heavens the place of his glory with a host of holy angels to serve him. But some of these, through pride or some other sin, fell from their high estate, and became devils, and they will be miserable forever. When he created the earth, he made man as his noblest creature here below, just one man and one woman, Adam and Eve. And he made them perfect, without any sin, and put them into the Garden of Eden, forbidding them to eat of one tree in the garden. He told them that if they ate of it, they would die.

But the devil, that fell first, tempted them to sin, and they gave way to his temptation and so fell under the curse of God's law. But God, in his infinite wisdom and mercy, sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Redeemer, who, in the fullness of time, was made a man, being born of a virgin through the power of the Holy Spirit. He lived on earth among the Jews for about thirty-three years, during which time he preached the gospel and did many miracles to prove his doctrine, healing the lame, the blind, the sick, and even raising up the dead by his divine power. In the end, he was offered up on the Cross a sacrifice for our sins, bearing the curse that we should have fallen upon us.

And now, if sinners believe in him and repent of their sins, he will freely forgive all that is past, will sanctify their corrupted nature, and will, at last, bring them to his heavenly kingdom and glory. But if they make light of their sins, and slight his mercy, he must condemn them to everlasting misery in hell. When Christ rose from the dead on the third day, he appointed his pastors to preach the gospel to the whole world. And when he had given this charge to his apostles, he ascended into heaven before their very

eyes, where he is now in glory, with God the Father, but still bearing our human nature. At the end of this world, he will come again as a man, will raise the dead to life, and bring them all before him that they may 'give an account of all their deeds done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.' If, then, you intend to be saved, you must believe in Christ as your only Saviour, in order to be delivered from the wrath to come. You must also repent of your sins. In short, you must be a wholly new creature in Christ, or there will be no salvation for you.'

Something similar - a brief rehearsal of the principles of the faith - will need to be delivered in the most informal manner you can manage, with a brief touch of application at the end, when you are dealing with the very ignorant. And if you see that they still do not understand, go over it again, and ask them if they understand it, and try to fix it in their memories.

Making converts

Whether they are ignorant or not, if you suspect them to be unconverted, do your best to inquire into their spiritual state. The best and least offensive way of doing this is to prepare them by saying something that will put their minds at rest and convince them of the need for questions. You can do this by asking something about the catechism that will touch their consciences. For example:

'You know that the Holy Spirit, through the Word, enlightens men's minds, and softens and opens their hearts, and then turns them from the power of Satan to God by faith in Christ, who will purify them to himself as his own special people. None but these can be made partakers of everlasting life. Now, I have no desire to pry into your private life, but the work of pastors is to give advice to their people concerning matters of salvation. It is dangerous to be mistaken in things that involve everlasting life or everlasting death, so I beg you to be honest, and tell me whether any great change has come into your heart? Did you discover that while you were reading the Word of God the Holy Spirit came into your understanding, and gave you a new and heavenly life that made you into a new creature? The Lord, who sees your heart, knows whether it is so. I beg you, therefore, to tell me the truth.'

If he tells you that he hopes he is converted, for everyone is a sinner, and he is sorry for his sins, or some such words, then tell him plainly, in a few words, of some of the true marks of conversion. Then press your enquiry like this:

'Your salvation or condemnation is important, so I want to help you as much as I can in this matter. I want you to be sure that you are not mistaken in such a solemn matter, and have found the truth before it is too late. Just as God will judge us impartially, so we have his Word before us by which we can judge ourselves. Now, this Word tells us most surely who will go to heaven and who will go to hell. The Scripture tells us that the state of an unconverted man is this: he sees no great happiness in the love and communion of God in the life to come, and his heart is not drawn from this present world to future blessedness. He lives a selfish life for himself or his flesh, and the main pursuit of his life is to live as well as he can on earth. In his view, religion is about the long distant future where he will be condemned after he leaves this world. Therefore, the world and the flesh are high in his list of priorities, and nearest to his heart. God and glory are way down the list, and service for God will be all that the world and the flesh can spare.

'This is so with every unconverted man; and all that fall into this category are in a state of misery. But the one who is truly converted has a light shining in his soul from God,

showing him the greatness of his sin and misery, and making it a heavy load on his soul. This light also shows him what Christ is, and what he has done for sinners, causing him to admire the riches of God's grace towards him.

'Oh, what glad news is this, that there is hope for such lost sinners as him! All his many sins can be forgiven, and this forgiveness is offered to all that will accept it. How gladly he takes up this message and free offer! In due time, he surrenders himself and all that he has to Christ, and promises to be wholly his. He looks forward to the everlasting glory that has been promised him. He now has such a sight of the blessed state of the saints in glory that he despises the world, and sees it as dross and dung in comparison. It is there that he sees his happiness and hopes, and takes all the affairs of this life as so much hindrance on the way. The main cause and concern of his life is to be happy in the life to come. This is the case of all those who are truly converted, and who are saved. Now, is this the case with you, or is it not? Have you experienced such a change as this in your soul?'

If he says, 'I hope I have', get down to details. Say, 'I beg you, then, answer me these further questions:

(1) Can you truly say that all the known sins of your past life have become a grief in your heart, and that you have felt something of that everlasting misery due to you because of them? Do you feel that you are under a sense of this heavy burden, and have you felt that you are a lost soul? Yet have you joyfully received the news of a Saviour, and cast your soul on Christ alone for pardon through his blood?

(2) Can you truly say that your heart is turned away from sin so far that you hate the sins that you once loved, and love the holy life that you once hated? Do you still live in the wilful practice of any conscious sin? Is there a sin you are not willing to forsake at whatever cost? Is there no duty that you are not willing to perform?

(3) Can you truly say that you are happy with the thought of everlasting enjoyment in the presence of God? Has it gripped your heart, your love, your desire, and your concerns? Are you resolved, in the strength of Divine grace, to let go of all that you possess in this world rather than risk your salvation? Is it not your daily business in life to seek it? Can you truly say that, though you have your failings and sins, your main concern in life is to please God and to enjoy him forever? Will you give the world God's leftovers, as it were, and not God the world's leftovers? Is it true that your business in the world is like that of a traveller seeking provisions for his journey, for heaven is the place you are heading for?

If his answers are in the affirmative, tell him how good it is for a man's heart to hate his sin and to set his sights for happiness on another world. He lives in this world for another one out of sight, and desires above all things to see it. Then turn to some of the articles in the catechism that deal with those duties you suspect are missing in his life, and ask him whether he is practising them. For instance, does he pray with his family, or even in private, and does he keep the Lord's Day holy?

I would, however, advise you to be very careful in passing too hasty a judgement on anyone you speak to, because it is not easy to discern whether a man is without God's grace, as some imagine it to be. You can do the work just as well without coming to such an absolute conclusion.

Counselling the unconverted

If, however, you discover that the person you are counselling is still in an unconverted

state, your next business is to employ all your skill in bringing his heart to a realisation of the peril of his position.

For example:

'Truly, my friend, the Lord knows that I do not want to make your condition worse than it is, nor bring you fear or trouble. But, I imagine that you would count me a treacherous enemy and not a faithful pastor if I should flatter you, and not tell you the truth. If you went to the doctor's for an illness, you would want him to tell you the truth, even if it is bad news. More so in this case! Knowing of your disease may, through fear, make it worse. But know this, or else you will never recover from it. I fear that you are still a stranger to the Christian life. For if you were a Christian, and truly converted, your heart would be fixed on God and the life to come, and you would make it your main business to prepare for everlasting happiness. And you would not dare to live in any wilful sin, nor neglect any known duty.

'Alas! What have you done? How have you spent your time up till now? Did you not know that you had a soul to be saved or lost, and that you will live in heaven or in hell forever? Did you not know that you spend your life and time in this world chiefly for the purpose of preparing for another? Alas! What have you been doing all this time that you are so ignorant of, or are unprepared for, death? If you had set your mind on heaven as you have of earth, you would have known this, and done more to prepare for it, and inquired more urgently after it than you ever did before. You have learnt how to do your business in the world, so why do you not learn more of the will of God, and concentrate on that? You have neighbours that need to learn more, that are as worldly-minded as you, and who have spent as little time on spiritual matters as you. Do you think that heaven is not worth your efforts, or that it can be obtained with no effort? Does not God bid you forsake trifling matters in the world, and seek first his kingdom and his righteousness?

'Alas! My friend, what if you had died before now in an unconverted state? What would have become of you, and where would you be now? How could you be so cruel to yourself as to risk your everlasting state, just as you have done? What were you thinking of? Did you not know that you will shortly die and be judged? Have you any greater work to do, or any greater business to complete, than your everlasting salvation? Do you think that anything in this world will comfort you in your dying hour, or purchase your salvation, or ease the pains of hell?'

Hammer these matters home with a solemn voice; for if you do not reach the heart, you will achieve nothing. And whatever does not touch deeply is soon forgotten.

Believing in Christ and what follows

Conclude the whole with a practical exhortation consisting of two parts: *first*, the duty of believing in Christ and *second*, using the external means of grace in the future to avoid former sins.

For example:

'My friend, I am really sorry to find you in so sad a case, but I would be sorrier still to leave you in it. Therefore, let me beg of you, for the Lord's sake, and for your own sake, to listen carefully to what I say to you concerning the future. It is of the Lord's great mercy that he has not cut you off in an unconverted state, that you remain alive and still have time left. There is a remedy offered you in the blood of Christ, and pardon and

sanctification and everlasting life are freely offered to you, as also to others. God has not let sinful man be destroyed as in the case of devils, nor has he made any exception in the offer of pardon and eternal life against you any more than he has done with others.

'Does your heart bleed over sin, and do you have faith in Christ for the remedy, and do you give yourself to him as your Saviour and Lord, and do you desire to be a new man in the future? Then the Lord will surely have mercy on you, and pardon all your sins, and grant everlasting salvation to your soul. I must tell you that, just as it is the great work of God's grace to give you a new heart, so if he ever means to pardon and save you, he will make this change in your life. He will make you feel your sins as though they were the heaviest burden in the world, showing you how terrible they are, and how they have brought you under his wrath and curse. He will make you see that you are spiritually lost, and that there is nothing for you but everlasting damnation unless you are pardoned by the blood of Christ and sanctified by his Spirit. He will show you how much you need Christ, and how all your hope and life rests in him. He will open your eyes to the emptiness of this world and all it affords. He will tell you that all your happiness is with God in that everlasting life in heaven where, with all the saints and angels, you will behold his glory, and live in his love, and be employed in his praise. Let me tell you that until this work is done in you, you will be an unhappy man. And if you die before it happens, you will be lost forever. But now hope and help lies before you, when at the end there will be none. Let me therefore entreat you, as you love your soul.

'*Firstly*, you will not remain in your present condition. Do not rest until a saving change comes about in your heart. Think, when you rise in the morning, "Oh, what if this day is my last, and death will find me in an unconverted state!" Think when you are going about your work, "Oh, how much greater is the work of getting my soul reconciled to God, and being sanctified by his Spirit!" Think when you are eating or drinking, or looking at your possessions in this world, "What good will all this do me if I live and die an enemy of God, and a stranger to Christ and his Spirit, and so perish forever?" Let these thoughts be in your mind day and night till your soul is changed.

'*Secondly*, I beg you to consider seriously what a vain world this is! How soon it will carry you to a cold grave and everlasting misery if you do not have a better treasure than this world affords. And consider what it means to live in the presence of God, and reign with Christ, and be like the angels. This is the life that Christ has secured for you, and is preparing for you, and offers you, if you will only accept it. Oh, think what madness it is to set aside such endless glory, and prefer fleshly dreams and earthly shadows in its place. Meditate on these things when you are alone, and let them dwell in your mind daily.

'*Thirdly*, I beg of you, make no delay to accept this happiness and this Saviour. Receive the Lord Jesus who offers you eternal life. Joyfully and thankfully accept his offer as the only way to make you happy; and then you will believe that he has dealt with all your sins.

'*Fourthly*, feel revolted against your former sins. Find out what has defiled your heart and life and cast it away from you, as you would with poison in your stomach, and hate the thought of having to repeat them.

'My last request to you is this: Be determined to use the means of grace until this change comes about; and then continue in them until your faith is confirmed, and, at last, perfected.

'You do not have the power to bring about this change in your heart and life, so go every day to God in prayer and ask him earnestly to forgive all your sins and change your heart, and show you the riches of his grace in Christ, and the glory of his kingdom. Besiege God day and night with these requests.

'Flee from temptation and sin, and forsake your former evil ways. Keep company with those who fear God. They will help you on your way to heaven.

'Be especially careful to keep the Lord's Day holy, both in public and in private. Account for every minute, and do not fritter away one quarter of an hour of your time. Use your time wisely, for it is a precious thing that God has given you purposely to fix your mind on him, and be instructed by him, and prepare yourself for your final end. What do you think about these things? Will you do this, or at least as much of it as you can? Will you make me a promise to this effect, and work hard keeping your promise?'

Be sure, if you can, to obtain this promise, and urge him to mend his ways with the assistance of the means of grace. Tell him to change his company and forsake his sins, for there are still more to deal with. And, in this way, tell him to wait for the change that will surely come. And do this solemnly, reminding him of the presence of God who has heard his promise, and who will expect him to keep it. When you have the opportunity on later occasions, remind him of the promise he made.

Conclude with an expression of pastoral care

At the end of the interview, do these two things:

(1) Put his mind at rest with a few words, expressing the hope that you have not offended him. For example:

'I beg of you, do not be upset that I have put you to all this trouble, or spoken to you so freely. It is as little pleasure to me as it is to you. If I did not know that these things are true and necessary, I would not have worked so hard to convince you. But I know that we will be in the world a little longer. We are almost at the brink of the world to come. So it is time for us to look about us, and be ready for when God calls us.'

As you may not soon have the opportunity to speak to him again, get him to promise to carry on what you have begun. Ask the master of each family to call all his family together to repeat every Lord's Day what they have learned from the catechism. Tell them to carry on until they have learned it perfectly. And when they know it by heart, still continue to hear them recite it regularly that they may not forget it. For it is a good thing to keep in memory a summary of the Christian faith.

As for heads of families, if some members of their households have learned only part of the catechism, invite them either to come to you again in their leisure time when they have learnt the rest, or else go to some able, experienced friend, and repeat it to him.

Keeping records

Write the names of all your parishioners in a book, and keep it by you. When they come to repeat the catechism, note their visits in your book, and take a note of those who did not come. Make a note also of those who are too ignorant to receive the Lord's Supper, and those who are. This you will be able to see from your personal work with them. But as for those that remain utterly obstinate, and will not come to you for instruction, treat them as

obstinate despisers of the truth, and speak on the subject in your sermons. Also, avoid them, and do not treat them as your friends, or admit them to the Lord's Supper. And though some pastors admit their children to baptism (a practice that offends me), yet I cannot, nor should I dare to do it, by any appeal to their ancestors' faith, or on the insistence of their rebellious parents.

Suiting your teaching to the one being counselled

Throughout your personal work, see that your method of teaching, as well as the subjects dealt with, is suitable. Concerning your method of teaching:

(1) See that you vary it to suit the people you are counselling. If they are youths, lay a greater stress on sexual matters, and show them the nature and necessity of mortification. If they are elderly, you will speak in harsh terms of this present world, and make sure that they understand how near their change is, and the sinfulness of their sin if they live and die in ignorance or impenitence. If they are very young, be more informal. If they are superior and older, be respectful. If they are rich, show them the vanity of this world and their need for self-denial, and the dangers of preferring the present world to the next. Show them how they may use their talents in the welfare of others. If they are poor, speak of the great riches of glory that are offered to them in the gospel, and how discomfort can be endured for the sake of everlasting joy in heaven. You must also speak of those sins that come with age, sex, temperament, or calling and employment in this world. Speak of the dangers of sex, temper, evil speaking, uncontrolled passion, malice, pride, drunkenness, ambition, etc.

(2) Be as open and informal and as simple as possible with those who cannot take in much.

(3) Give them Scriptural proofs for all that you say, that they may see that it is not you, but God, who is speaking through you.

(4) Be as serious as you can during the whole session, but especially when you apply the message. There is nothing to fear more than that some careless pastors will make a mess of their work, and do everything superficially and without life, and ruin it as they do their other duties by turning it into a mere formal exercise. They get by with posing a few cold questions to their people, and by giving them two or three cold words of advice, without any life or feeling. No wonder they do not get a good response from their hearers! But surely, he who values souls, and seizes the opportunity that comes his way, will go through the exercise with a deep solemnity, and be as serious with them as possible as he deals with life and death issues.

(5) To this end, I think it is very necessary that, both before and during the work, we take special care of our own hearts to stimulate and strengthen our belief in the truths of the gospel, and the invisible glory or misery that are to come. I am confident that personal work will test the strength of our beliefs to the utmost. The pastor who is only superficially a Christian, and not sound at heart, will likely feel that his zeal will fail him, especially when he is taken up in the duties of personal work, and his belief in the things that he is handling is put to the test. Pretended and hypocritical efforts will not last long in duties of this kind. A pulpit can conceal such weaknesses, but not a conference with poor ignorant souls. The pulpit is the hypocritical minister's stage. There, and in other public acts where there is room for false show, you will see him at his best. We have a different kind of man who can do personal work effectively.

(6) I would emphasise that we must prepare ourselves for this work with private prayer. And if time permits, and with so many gathered together, it might be as well if we began and ended our sessions with a short prayer.

(7) Above all, as you do your work, clearly demonstrate your love for their souls, and make them feel throughout that you are aiming at nothing but their salvation. Avoid every critical, discouraging word.

(8) If you do not have the time to deal fully with each individual, then concentrate on the most important issues. Take several of them together if they are friends, and if they are reluctant to speak of their weaknesses to each other, talk generally to them all. Only an examination of their knowledge and state and conviction concerning sin and misery, and special directions to them, should be addressed to individuals alone. But do not pass over the work with an unfaithful laziness, and be too brief without real need.

Graciousness

Lastly, as God enables you, extend your charity to the poor before they go home. Give them something for their relief, and recognise the time they have spent away from their work. Specially encourage those who work very hard. As for the rest, there is no reason why you should not promise them something as a reward for learning their catechism. I know that you cannot give them much, but I mention it because there may be other who could help in this.



So now, my brothers, I have finished my advice, and leave you to act upon it. The proud receive my words with scorn, and the selfish and lazy with distaste, perhaps indignation. But I do not doubt that God will use my words, even in the face of opposition from sin and Satan, to awaken many of his transformed servants to be up and doing in their work in promoting the work of a true reformation. May God's blessing accompany this present undertaking with the salvation of many souls, and give peace to you who have promised to perform it! May the work be extended among his servants throughout our nation for the spiritual health, purity, and unity of his churches! Amen!