

# THE SPECIAL DUTY OF PASTORS OF CHURCHES

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## The True Nature of the Church and Its Government

*Modernized language, notes, and formatting*

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WE have declared the way by which pastors are given to and instated in the church. What should ensue is an accounting of their work and duty in the discharge of their office. But this has been the subject of many long discourses, both among the ancient writers of the church and as of late; I shall therefore only touch on some things that are most necessary to consider:

1. The first and principal duty of a pastor is to *feed the flock* by diligent preaching of the word. It is a promise relating to the New Testament that God would give to his church “*pastors according to his own heart, who would feed them with knowledge and understanding.*” <sup>Jer 3:15</sup> This is by teaching or preaching the word, and not otherwise. This feeding is the essence of the office of a pastor, as to its exercise; so that he who does not, or cannot, or will not feed the flock is no pastor, whatever outward call or work he may have in the church. The care of preaching the gospel was committed to Peter, and through him to all true pastors of the church, under the name of “feeding.” <sup>1</sup> According to the example of the apostles, they are to free themselves from all encumbrances, so that they may give themselves wholly to the word and prayer. <sup>Acts 6:1-4</sup> Their work is “to labor in the word and doctrine,” <sup>1Tim 5:17</sup>; and thereby to “feed the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers,” <sup>Acts 20:28</sup> and it is what is given everywhere to those in charge.

This work and duty, therefore, as was said, is *essential* to the office of a pastor. A man is a pastor to those whom he leads by pastoral teaching, and to no others; the one who does not feed in this way is no pastor. Nor is it required only that he preach now and then at his leisure, but that he lay aside all other employments, though lawful, and all other duties in the church, if his constant attention to them would divert him from this work – so that he is laboring to the utmost of his ability in these things. Without this, no man will be able to give a comfortable account of the pastoral office at the Last Day.

There is, indeed, no more required of any man than what God gives him the ability for. Weakness, sickness, bodily infirmities, may disable men from the actual discharge of this duty in that assiduity<sup>2</sup> and frequency which are required in ordinary cases. Some may, through age or other incapacitating illness, be utterly disabled for it – in which case it is their duty to lay down their office and be dismissed from it. Or if their disability is only partial, they should provide a suitable replacement, so that the edification of the church is not prejudiced. But for men to pretend to be pastors of the church, and to be unable for, or negligent of, this work and duty, is to live in open defiance of the commands of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> **John 21:15-17** So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, *son of Jonah*, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” <sup>16</sup> He said to him again a second time, “Simon, *son of Jonah*, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” <sup>17</sup> He said to him the third time, “Simon, *son of Jonah*, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.”

<sup>2</sup> [Constant diligence and attention.](#)

We have lived to see and hear of reproachful scorn and contempt thrown upon “laboring in the word and doctrine.” <sup>1Tim 5.17</sup> All manner of discouragements are given, endeavoring to suppress it in a number of instances. Indeed, some have gone so far as to declare that the work of preaching is unnecessary in the church. That would reduce religion to the reading and rule of the liturgy. The next attempt, I suspect, might be to exclude Christ himself from their religion. That is what denying the necessity of preaching the gospel leads to; indeed it makes good progress toward it.

A number of things are required for this work and duty of pastoral preaching, such as,

(1.) *Spiritual wisdom* and understanding in the mysteries of the gospel, so that they may declare to the church “all the counsel of God” and “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> The majority of the church, especially those who are grown in knowledge and experience, have a spiritual insight into these things. The apostle prays that all believers might have it.<sup>2</sup> But if those who instruct them, or were to do so, do not have some degree of eminence in it, they cannot be useful to lead others on to perfection. The little care or concern for this, has rendered the ministry of many a preacher both fruitless and useless in our days.

(2.) *Experience of the power of the truth* which they preach, in and upon their own souls. Without this, they will be lifeless and heartless in their own work; and their labor for the most part will be unprofitable to others. It is attended to by such men, as a task for their advantage, or as something that carries some satisfaction from the ostentation and supposed reputation that accompany it. But a man preaches only that sermon well to others which preaches itself in his own soul. The man who does not feed on and thrive by digesting the food which he provides for others, will hardly make it savory to them. Indeed, he does not know if the food he has provided may be poison, unless he has really tasted it himself. If the word does not dwell with power *in* us, it will not pass with power *from* us. No man lives in a more woeful condition than those who do not really believe themselves what they persuade others to believe continually. The lack of this experience of the power of gospel truth on their own souls is what gives us so many lifeless, sapless orations, quaint in words, and dead in power – instead of preaching the gospel in the demonstration of the Spirit. Let anyone say what they please, it is evident that some men’s preaching, as well as others’ not-preaching, has lost the credit of their ministry.

(3.) *Skill to divide the word rightly;* <sup>2Tim 2:15</sup> this consists in a practical wisdom, by diligent attendance to the word of truth, to discover what is real, substantial, and fit food for the souls

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<sup>1</sup> **Acts 20:27** "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God; **1Cor 2:4-7** And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; <sup>5</sup> that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. <sup>6</sup> However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. <sup>7</sup> But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory; **Eph 3:8-11** To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; <sup>10</sup> to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly *places*, <sup>11</sup> according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord;

<sup>2</sup> **Eph 1:15** Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup> do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, <sup>18</sup> the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.

of the hearers – to give to all sorts of persons in the church their proper portion. And this requires,

(4.) A *prudent and diligent consideration of the state of the flock* over which any man is set, as to their strength or weakness, their growth or defect in knowledge (the measure of their attainments requiring either milk or strong meat), their temptations and duties, their spiritual decay or thriving – not only generally but, as near as possible, with respect to all the individual members of the church. Without a due regard for these things, men preach randomly, fighting uncertainly, like those who beat the air.<sup>1Cor 9.26</sup> Preaching sermons that are not designed to benefit those to whom they are preached; insisting on general doctrines that are not adjusted to the condition of the hearers; speaking words without considering whether those words ought to be said – are all things that will make those whose minds do not have obvious advantages, weary of preaching; and they will make others weary simply by hearing them.

(5.) All of these, in the whole discharge of their duty, are to be constantly accompanied with the evidence of their *zeal for the glory of God* and *compassion for the souls of men*. If these are not vigorously exercised in the minds and souls of those who preach the word, demonstrating themselves to the consciences of those who hear them, then the quickening form, the life and soul of preaching, is lost.

All these things seem common, obvious, and universally acknowledged; but the ruin of the ministry of most for lack of them, or from notable defects in them, is or may be no less evidently known. And the very naming of them (which is all I intend to do at present) is sufficient to evidence how incumbent it is on all pastors of churches to give themselves to the word and to prayer, to labor in the word and doctrine, to be continually intent on this work, to engage all the faculties of their souls, to stir up all their graces and gifts, for constant exercise in discharging their duty. For “who is sufficient for these things?”<sup>2Cor 2.16</sup> Just as the consideration of these is sufficient to stir all ministers to fervent prayer for supplies of divine aid and assistance for the work which they cannot perform in their own strength, so is it enough to warn them to avoid all things that would divert or distract them from their constant attendance to its discharge.

When men undertake the pastoral office, and either judge that it not their duty to preach, or are not able to do so, or they attempt it only on solemn occasions, or attend to it as a task required of them, but they lack that wisdom, skill, diligence, care, prudence, zeal, and compassion which are required for it, the glory and usefulness of the ministry will be utterly destroyed.

2. The second duty of a pastor towards his flock is *continual fervent prayer for them*.<sup>1</sup> “We will give ourselves continually to prayer.”<sup>Acts 6:4</sup> Without this, no man can or does preach to the flock as he should, nor does he perform any other duty of his pastoral office. From this, any man may take the best measure of the discharge of his duty towards his flock. The one who constantly, diligently, and fervently prays for them, will have a testimony in himself of his own sincerity in the discharge of all his other pastoral duties; nor can he voluntarily omit or neglect any of them. As for those who are negligent in this, no matter how great their pains, labor, and travail in other duties, they may be influenced by other reasons; and so they give no evidence of sincerity in the discharge of their office. This constant prayer for the church is so incumbent on all pastors, that whatever is done without prayer has no value in the sight of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Jas 5:16; Joh 17:20; Exo 32:11; Deut 9:18; Lev 16:24; 1Sam 12:23; 2Cor 13:7, 9; Eph 1:15-19,3:14; Phil 1:4; Col 1:3; 2Thess 1:11

So respect is to be paid,

(1.) *to the success of the word*, to all its blessed ends among them. These are no less than the improvement and strengthening of all their graces, the direction of all their duties, their edification in faith and love, along with the entire conduct of their souls in the life of God, for the enjoyment of him. To preach the word, therefore, and not follow it with constant and fervent prayer for its success, is to disbelieve its use, neglect its end, and throw away the seed of the gospel at random.

(2.) *to the temptations that the church is generally exposed to*. These greatly vary according to the outward circumstances of things. The temptations in general that accompany a state of outward peace and tranquility have another nature than those that attend a time of trouble, persecution, distress, and poverty, and also with regard to other occasions and circumstances. The pastors of churches ought to diligently consider these, looking at them as the means and ways by which churches have been ruined, and the souls of many lost forever. With respect to them, therefore, their prayers for the church ought to be fervent.

(3.) *to the specific state and condition of all the members, as far as it is known to them*. There may be those who are spiritually sick and diseased, tempted, afflicted, out of sight, wandering out of the way, surprised in sins and miscarriages, disconsolate and troubled in spirit in a special manner. The remembrance of them all ought to abide with the pastor, and be continually called over in their daily pastoral supplications.

(4.) *to the presence of Christ in the assembly of the church*, with all the blessed evidences and testimonies of it. This alone is what gives life and power to all church assemblies, without which all outward order and forms of divine worship in them are but a dead carcass. Now, this presence of Christ in the assemblies of his church is by his Spirit, accompanying all ordinances of worship with a gracious, divine efficacy, evidencing itself by blessed operations on the minds and hearts of the congregation. Pastors of churches are to continually to pray for this. Those who do so, understand that all the success of their labors, and all the acceptance of the church with God in their duties, depend on it.

(5.) *to their preservation in faith, love, and fruitfulness*, with all the duties that belong to them, etc.

It should be greatly desired that all those who take upon themselves this pastoral office well consider and understand how great and necessary a part of their work and duty consists in their continual fervent prayer for their flocks. It is the only instituted way by which they may, by virtue of their office, bless their congregations. But in and by the discharge of their duty to pray, they will also find their hearts and minds more and more filled with love, and engaged with diligence toward all other duties of their office. And they will be motivated to the exercise of all grace towards the whole church on all occasions. Where any are negligent in this duty, every other duty which they perform towards the church will be influenced by false considerations, and it will not hold weight in the balance of the sanctuary.

**3.** *The administration of the seals of the covenant* is committed to them as stewards of the house of Christ; for the authoritative dispensation of the word, to which the administration of the seals is annexed, is committed to them. Their principal end is the special confirmation and application of the preached word. And in this there are three things that they are to attend to:

(1.) The *times* and seasons of their administration for the church's edification, especially that of the Lord's Supper whose frequency is enjoined. It is the duty of pastors to consider all the necessary circumstances of their administration as to time, place, frequency, order, and decency.

(2.) To keep *severely* to Christ's institution, as to the way and manner of their administration. The gradual introduction of uninstituted rites and ceremonies into the church celebration of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper ended at length in the idolatry of the mass. In this then, alone, and not in bowing, cringing, and vestments, lies the glory and beauty of these administrations: namely, that they are compliant with and expressive of the institution of Christ, nor is anything done in them except in express obedience to his authority. "I have received from the Lord what I also delivered to you," says the apostle in this case. <sup>1Cor 11:23</sup>

(3.) To take care that these holy things are administered *only to those who are fit and worthy*, according to the rule of the gospel. Those who impose on pastors the promiscuous administration of these divine ordinances, or the application of the seals to all without difference, deprive them of one-half of their ministerial office and duty.

But here it is asked by some, "If a church has no pastor at present, nor a teaching elder with pastoral power, may it not temporarily delegate and appoint the administration of these special ordinances to some qualified member of the church who is fit for their outward administration?" For the sake of some, I shall examine this.

No church is complete in order *without teaching officers*.<sup>1</sup>

A church that is not complete in order cannot be complete in administrations, because the power of administrations depends proportionately upon the power of order. That is, the power of the church depends upon the being of the church. Hence the first duty of a church without officers is to obtain them, according to rule. And to endeavor to complete the administrations without an antecedent completing of its order is contrary to the mind of Christ. <sup>Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5</sup> "You should set in order the things that are lacking, and ordain elders in every church." The practice proposed is therefore irregular, and it is contrary to the mind of Christ.

The order of the church is twofold – it is *essential* and it is *organic*.

The *essential* order of the church, with its power that arises from that order, is first for its preservation, and secondly for its perfection.

- (1.) For its preservation in the admission and exclusion of members;
- (2.) For its perfection in the election of officers.

No part of this power which belongs to the essence of the church, can be delegated; it must be carried out by the whole church. They cannot delegate power to some to admit members, in such a way that it is not an act of the whole church. They cannot delegate power to anyone to elect officers, nor can they delegate anything else which essentially belongs to them as a church. The

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<sup>1</sup> **Eph 4:11** And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ... **1Cor 12:27** Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

reason is that things which belong to the essence of anything, belong to it formally, and so they cannot be transferred.

The church, therefore, cannot delegate the power and authority asked for, unless it is assumed to belong to the essential power of the order of the church, which it does not.

If the church may delegate or substitute others to discharge all ordinances whatsoever, without elders or pastors, then it may perfect the saints and complete the work of the ministry without them, which is contrary to Ephesians 4:11-12; and, secondly, it would render the ministry only convenient, and not absolutely necessary to the church, which is contrary to its institution.

A particular church, in its *organic* order, is the sole adequate subject of all the ordinances, and not in its *essential* order. That is because, in its essential order, it can never benefit from all the ordinances, specifically the ministry by which it is constituted as *organic*. If it could, then the church in its essential order would indeed be the sole adequate subject of all the ordinances.

Though the church is the only *subject* of gospel ordinances, it is not the only *object* of them; rather, the objects are varied. For instance,

(1.) The *preaching of the word*: its first object is the *world*, for conversion; its next object is *those who profess Christ*, for their edification.

(2.) *Baptism*: its object is neither the *world* nor the *members of a particular church*, but only *those who profess Christ*, along with those who are reckoned to them by God's appointment – that is, their infant seed.

(3.) The *supper*: its object is a *particular church only*, which is acknowledged, and it may be approved by the institution, one special end of it; the necessity of discipline depends on it.

Ordinances, of which the church is the only subject and the only object, cannot be administered authoritatively except by church officers,

(1.) Because none but Christ's stewards have authority in and towards his house as such.<sup>1</sup>

(2.) Because it is an act of office-authority to represent Christ to the whole church, and to feed the whole flock by that authority.<sup>2</sup>

There are no footprints of any such practice among the churches of God who walked in order – not in the Scripture nor in all antiquity.

But it is objected by those who allow this practice, that “If the church may appoint or send a person out to preach to others, or appoint a brother to preach to themselves, then they may appoint him to administer the ordinance of the supper.”

*Ans.* There is a mistake in the supposition. The church, that is, the church body, cannot authoritatively send out any brother to preach. There are two things required for it: the collation

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<sup>1</sup> **1Cor 4:1** Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. **1Tim 3:15** but if I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. **Mat 24:45** Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?

<sup>2</sup> **Acts 20:28** "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. **1Pet 5:2** Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.

of gifts with the communication of the office. The church can do neither for someone who is sent out. But where *God* gives gifts someone by his Spirit and calls him by his providence, the church only complies with it, not by communicating any authority to the person, but by praying for a blessing upon his work.

It is the same case when desiring a brother to teach among them. The duty is moral in its nature; the gifts and call are from God alone; only the occasion of exercising his gifts is administered by the church.

It is further added by the same persons that, "If a brother or one who is only a disciple may baptize, then he may also administer the Lord's supper when it is desired by the church."

*Ans.* The supposition is not granted nor proved; but there is still a difference between these ordinances – the object of the one is those at large who profess Christ; the object of the other is those who profess Christ as members of a particular church.

But to return,

**4.** It is incumbent on them *to preserve the truth or doctrine of the gospel* received and professed in the church, and to defend it against all opposition. This is one principal end of the ministry, and one principal means of the preservation of the faith once delivered to the saints. This is committed especially to the pastors of the churches, as the apostle frequently and emphatically repeats its charge to Timothy, and through him to all to whom the dispensation of the word is committed.<sup>1</sup> He gives the same charge to the elders of the church at Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> What he says of himself, that the "glorious gospel of the blessed God was committed to his trust," <sup>1Tim 1:11</sup> is true of all pastors of churches, according to their measure and call; and they should all aim at the account which he gives of his ministry in this: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." <sup>2Tim 4:7</sup> The church is the "pillar and ground of the truth;" <sup>1Tim 3:15</sup> and it is principally so in its ministry. The sinful neglect of this duty was the cause of most of the pernicious heresies and errors that have infested and ruined the church. Those whose duty it was to preserve the doctrine of the gospel entire in its public profession, have (many of them) "spoken perverse things to draw away disciples after them." <sup>Acts 20:30</sup> Bishops, presbyters, public

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<sup>1</sup> **1Tim 1:3** As I urged you when I went into Macedonia-- remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, <sup>4</sup> nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. **1Tim 4:6** If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. <sup>7</sup> But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. **1Tim 4:16** Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. **1Tim 6:20** O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge. **2Tim 1:14** That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. **2Tim 2:25** ...in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth... **2Tim 3:14** But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, <sup>15</sup> and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

<sup>2</sup> **Acts 20:28** "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. <sup>29</sup> "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. <sup>31</sup> "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

teachers, have been the ringleaders in heresies. Which is why this duty is especially to be attended to at this time, when the fundamental truths of the gospel are impugned on all sides, by all sorts of adversaries.

A number of things are required for this, such as,

(1.) *A clear, sound, comprehensive knowledge of the entire doctrine of the gospel*, attained by all means that are useful and commonly prescribed for that end, especially by diligent study of the Scripture, with fervent prayer for illumination and understanding. Men cannot preserve for others what they are ignorant of themselves. Truth may be lost by weakness as well as by wickedness. And the defect in this, in many, is deplorable.

(2.) *Love of the truth* which they have so learned and comprehended. Unless we look at truth as a pearl, as what is valued at any rate, bought with any price, as what is better than all the world, we will not endeavor to preserve it with the required diligence. Some are ready to part with truth at an easy rate, or to grow indifferent about it; we have multitudes of examples in the days in which we live. It would be easy to give instances of various important evangelical truths, which our forefathers in the faith contended for with all earnestness, and were ready to seal with their blood, which are now utterly disregarded and opposed by some who pretend to succeed them in their profession. If ministers do not have a sense of that power of truth in their own souls, and a taste of its goodness, then the discharge of this duty is not to be expected from them.

(3.) *A conscientious care and fear of giving countenance or encouragement to novel opinions*, especially those that oppose any truth whose power and efficacy has been experienced among those who believe. Vain curiosity, boldness in conjectures, and readiness to vent their own conceits, have caused no small trouble and damage to the church.

(4.) *Learning and ability of mind to discern and disprove the oppositions of the adversaries of the truth*, and thereby to stop their mouths and convince those who question it.

(5.) *The solid confirmation of the most important truths of the gospel*, into which all other truths are resolved, in their teaching and ministry. Men may and often do prejudice, indeed, betray the truth by the weakness of their pleas for it.

(6.) *Keeping a diligent watch over their own flocks* against the craft of outside seducers, and against any bitter root of error springing up among themselves.

(7.) *Concurrent assistance with the elders and messengers of other churches with whom they are in communion*, in declaring the faith which they all profess; we must talk more at large about this later.

It is evident what learning, labor, study, pains, ability, and exercise of the rational faculties, are ordinarily required for the right discharge of these duties. Where men may be useful to the church in other things, but are defective in these things, it becomes them to walk and act both circumspectly and humbly, frequently desiring and adhering to the advice of those whom God has entrusted with more talents and greater abilities.

5. It belongs to their charge and their office to diligently *labor for the conversion of souls to God*. The ordinary means of conversion is left to the church, and the church's duty it is to attend to it. Indeed, one of the principal ends of the institution and preservation of churches is the conversion of souls. When there are no more to be converted, there shall be no more church on the earth. To



enlarge the kingdom of Christ, to diffuse the light and savor of the gospel, to be subservient to the calling of the elect, and to gather all the sheep of Christ into his fold, are things that God designs by his churches in this world.

Now, the principal and instrumental cause of all these things is the preaching of the word; and this is committed to the pastors of the churches. It is true, men may be (and often are) converted to God through the occasional dispensation of the word by those who are not called to office. For it is the gospel itself that is the “power of God for salvation,” <sup>Rom 1.16</sup> whoever it is administered by. It has been effectual to that end even in the necessary and occasional teaching of women. But frequently it is effective in the exercise of spiritual gifts by those who are not stated officers of the church,<sup>1</sup> yet this does not hinder its dispensation. But the administration of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, as to all its ends, is committed to the pastors of the church; and the first object of the preaching of the gospel is the conversion of the world, or its men. And this is true in the preaching of all those to whom that work is committed by Christ.

The work of the apostles and evangelists had this order in it: *First*, they were to make disciples of men by the preaching of the gospel for conversion; and this was their principal work, as Paul testifies.<sup>2</sup> In this, they were gloriously instrumental in laying the foundation of the kingdom of Christ all over the world. The *second* part of their work was to teach those who were converted, and make disciples who would do and observe all that Christ commanded them. In the pursuit of this part of their commission, they gathered the disciples of Christ into churches under ordinary officers of their own. Although the work of these ordinary officers, pastors, and teachers is of the same nature as the apostles and evangelists, yet the method of it is changed in them. For their *first* ordinary work is to conduct and teach all the disciples of Christ to do and observe all things appointed by him – that is, to preach and watch over the particular flocks to whom they are related. But they are not discharged by that from an interest in the other part of the work – in preaching the word for the conversion of souls.

They are not bound to the method of the apostles and evangelists; indeed, by virtue of their office, they are ordinarily excluded from it. After a man is called to be a pastor of a particular church, it is not his duty to leave that church, and go up and down to preach for the conversion of strangers. It is not, I say, *ordinarily* so. For many cases may occur in which the edification of any particular church should give way to the glory of Christ with respect to calling the members of the church catholic.<sup>3</sup> But in the discharge of the pastoral office, there are many occasions for preaching the word for the conversion of souls, such as,

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<sup>1</sup> **1Cor 14:24** But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. <sup>25</sup> And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. **Phil 1:14, 15, 18** ...and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will... <sup>18</sup> What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. **1Pet 4:10** As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.

<sup>2</sup> **1Cor 1:17** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

<sup>3</sup> That is, with respect to calling the members of the larger church – ‘catholic’ here means *as a whole or entire*.

(1.) When any unconverted persons *come into the church assemblies*, and are worked on by the power of the word. We experience this every day. A man, preaching to one congregation, at the same time and in the same place, cannot preach with ministerial authority to those that are of the church to which he is related, and preach to the others only by virtue of a spiritual gift which he has received. No man can distinguish those in his own conscience – and there is no rule or reason for it. Pastors, with respect to their whole office and all its duties, of which many can have only the church for their object, are ministers *in office* to the church; and so they are ministers of the church. Yet they are also ministers of Christ; and it is by *him*, and not by the *church*, that the preaching of the gospel is committed to them. And it is so committed to them, by virtue of their office, that they are to use it for all its ends in Christ’s way and method – of which the conversion of sinners is one. No man can conceive of himself as having a double capacity while he is preaching to the same congregation, and no man’s experience can reach it.

(2.) *In occasional preaching* in other places, to which a pastor of a church may be called and directed by divine providence. Although we have no concern in the figment of an indelible character accompanying sacred orders, we do not think that the pastoral office is such that a man must leave it behind him every time he goes from home; nor is it in his own power, or in the power of all men in the world, to divest him of it, unless he is dismissed or deposed from it by Christ himself, through the rule of his word. Wherever a true minister preaches, he preaches as a minister; for as a minister, the administration of the gospel is committed to him as to all its ends, of which the chief end, as was said, is the conversion of souls. Indeed, it is of such weight that the convenience and edification of particular churches ought to give way to it. When, therefore, there are great opportunities and providential calls to preach the gospel for the conversion of souls, and the harvest being so great that there are insufficient laborers for it, it is lawful, indeed, it is the *duty* of pastors of particular churches to leave their constant attendance on their pastoral charge in those churches, at least for a season, to apply themselves to the more public preaching of the word for the conversion of the souls of men. Nor will any particular church be unwilling, if it understands that the whole end of particular churches is but the edification of the church catholic, and that their good and advantage is to give way to the glory of Christ in the whole. The good shepherd will leave the ninety and nine sheep, to seek after one that wanders; and we may certainly leave a few for a season, to seek after a great multitude of wanderers, when we are called to this by divine providence – and I could heartily wish that we might have a trial of it at this time.

The ministers who have been most celebrated, and deservedly so in the last ages, in this and in neighboring nations, have been such that God made their ministry eminently successful for the conversion of souls. To affirm that they did not do their work as ministers, by virtue of their ministerial office, is to throw away the crown and destroy the principal glory of the ministry. For my own part, if I did not think myself bound to preach as a minister, and as a minister authorized in all places and on all occasions, when I am called to it, I think I would not preach much more in this world. Nor do I know at all what rule they walk by who continue constant public preaching for many years, and yet neither desire nor intend to be called to any pastoral office in the church. But I must not insist on the debate of these things here.

6. It belongs to them, on the account of their pastoral office, to be *ready, willing, and able, to comfort, relieve, and refresh, those that are tempted*, tossed, wearied with fears and grounds of disconsolation, in times of trial and desertion. “The tongue of the learned” is required in them, “that they should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” [Isa 50.4](#) One excellent

qualification of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the discharge of his priestly office now in heaven, is that he is touched with a sense of our infirmities, and he knows how to succor those that are tempted. His whole flock in this world is a company of tempted ones; his own life on the earth he calls “the time of his temptation;” and those who have charge of his flock under him ought to have a sense of their infirmities, and endeavor in a special way to succor those that are tempted. But there are always some among them that are cast under darkness and disconsolations in a peculiar manner: some are at the entrance of their conversion to God, while they have a deep sense of the terror of the Lord, the sharpness of conviction, and the uncertainty of their condition; some are relapsed into sin or omissions of duties; some under great, sore, and lasting afflictions; some upon pressing, urgent, particular occurrences; some on sovereign, divine *desertions*; some through the *buffetings of Satan* and the injection of blasphemous thoughts into their minds, with many other occasions of a similar nature. Now, the troubles, disconsolations, dejections, and fears, that arise in the minds of persons in these exercises and temptations are various, oftentimes urged and fortified with subtle arguments and fair pretences, perplexing the souls of men almost to despair and death. It belongs to the office and duty of pastors,

(1.) To be able *to rightly understand the various cases that will occur of this kind*, from such principles and grounds of truth and experience as will bear a just confidence in their prudent application to relieve those concerned – to have “the tongue of the learned, to know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” <sup>Isa 50.4</sup> It will not be done by a collection and determination of cases, which is still useful in its place; for we will hardly meet with two cases of this kind that can be exactly determined by the same rule, for all manner of circumstances give them variety. But what is required for this are skill, understanding, and experience in the whole nature of the work of the Spirit of God on the souls of men; of the conflict that exists between the flesh and the Spirit; of the methods and wiles of Satan; of the wiles of the principalities and powers or wicked spirits that are in high places; of the nature, effects, and ends of divine desertions – along with wisdom to apply such principles, or to make appropriate medicines and remedies for every sore and distemper. These things are despised by some, neglected by some, and looked after by some only in cases of conscience where it is known that some have horribly debauched their own consciences and those of others, to the scandal and ruin of religion so far as they have prevailed. This is not to dispute how far helps such as books written on cases of conscience may be useful in this; they may be greatly useful to those who know how to use them rightly. But the proper ways by which pastors and teachers must obtain this skill and understanding are by diligent study of the Scriptures, meditation on it, fervent prayer, experience of spiritual things, and temptations in their own souls – with a prudent observation of the way God has dealt with others, and the ways in which opposition is made to the work of his grace in them. Without these things, all pretences to this ability and duty of the pastoral office are vain; which is why the whole work of it is much neglected.

(2.) To be ready and willing to *attend to the special cases that may be brought to them*, and not to look at them as unnecessary diversions; rather, a due application to them is a principal part of their office and duty. To discountenance, to discourage anyone from seeking relief in perplexities of this nature, to bring it to them with a seeming moroseness and unconcern, is to turn away the lame, to push away the diseased, and not at all express the care of Christ for his flock, Isaiah 40:11. Indeed, it is their duty to hearken after those who may be so troubled, to seek them out, and to give them their counsel and direction on all occasions.

(3.) To *bear patiently and tenderly with the weakness*, ignorance, dullness, slowness to believe and to receive satisfaction, yes, maybe impertinence in those who are so tempted. These things will abound among them, partly from their natural infirmities, many being weak and perhaps froward, but especially from the nature of their temptations, which are suited to disorder and disquiet their minds, to fill them with perplexed thoughts, and to make them jealous of everything in which they are spiritually concerned. If much patience, meekness, and condescension is not exercised towards them, they are quickly turned out of the way.

In the discharge of the whole pastoral office, there is no duty of more importance, nor in which the Lord Jesus Christ is more concerned, nor more eminently suited to the nature of the office itself, than this. But it is a work or duty which, for the reasons mentioned, must be accompanied with the exercise of humility, patience, self-denial, and spiritual wisdom – having experience with the wearisome diversions on other occasions. Some of old had gotten the conduct of the souls of men into their management, and turned this whole part of their office and duty into an engine they called “auricular confession,”<sup>1</sup> by which they wrested the consciences of Christians to promote their own ease, wealth, authority, and often worse ends.

7. *A compassionate suffering* with all the members of the church in all their trials and troubles, whether internal or external, belongs to them in the discharge of their office; nothing renders them more like Jesus Christ, whom it is their principal duty to represent to the church. The view and consideration, by faith, of the glory of Christ in his compassion with his suffering members, is the principal spring of consolation to the church in all its distresses. And the same spirit, the same mind in this, according to their measure, ought to be in all who have the pastoral office committed to them. So the apostle expresses it in himself,

“Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I do not burn?” 2Cor 11:29.

Unless this compassion and goodness runs through the discharge of their whole office, men cannot be said to be evangelical shepherds; nor can the sheep be said in any sense to be their own. There are those who perhaps pretend to the pastoral office, to live in wealth and pleasure, regardless of the sufferings and temptations of their flock, or of the poor of it, or who are related to churches in which it is impossible for them to even be acquainted with the state of the greatest part of them; this does not correspond to the institution of their office, nor to Christ’s design in it.

8. *Care of the poor and visitation of the sick* are parts of this duty, commonly known, though commonly neglected.

9. *The principal care of the rule of the church* is incumbent on its pastors. This is the second general head of the power and duty of this office, to which many things in particular belong. But because I will treat the rule of the church by itself distinctly later, I will not insist upon it here.

10. *There is a communion to be observed among all the churches of the same faith and profession in any nation.* What it consists in, and what is required for it, will be declared afterward. The principal care of this communion, for the edification of the churches, is incumbent on their pastors. Whether it is exercised by letters of mutual advice, of congratulation or consolation, or in testimony of communion with those called to office in those churches, or whether it is by convening in synods for consultation of their joint concerns (which things made

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to the Roman Catholic tradition of “confession in the ear” (confessional). To read about such abuses, see William Tyndale’s [The Obedience of a Christian Man](#), 1528, “Of Confession,” p. 57ff.

up a great part of the primitive ecclesiastical polity), it is their duty to attend to it and to take care of it.

**11.** I will close with something concerning these few instances of the pastoral charge and duty, without which all the rest will neither be useful to men nor be accepted by the great shepherd, Christ Jesus. And that is *a humble, holy, exemplary conversation, in all godliness and honesty*. The rules and precepts of the Scripture, the examples of Christ and his apostles, with that of the bishops or pastors of the primitive churches, and the nature of the thing itself, with the religion which we profess, undeniably prove that this duty is necessary and indispensable in a gospel ministry. It would be easy to fill up a volume with ancient examples to this purpose, with testimonies of the Scripture and of the first writers among Christians, with examples of public and private miscarriages in it, and with evident demonstrations, that the ruin of Christian religion in most nations where it has been professed, and so of the nations themselves, has proceeded from the ambition, pride, luxury, uncleanness, profaneness, and otherwise vicious conversations, of those who have been called the “clergy.” And in daily observation, it is a thing written with the beams of the sun, that whatever else is done in churches, if their pastors, or those who are so esteemed, are not exemplary in gospel obedience and holiness, religion will not be carried on and improved among the people. If persons are admitted into this office who are light or profane in their habits, garbs, and converse; if they are corrupt in their communication, unsavory and barren as to their spiritual discourse; if they are covetous, oppressive, and contentious; if they are negligent in their holy duties in their own families, and thus cannot stir up others to diligence in it; and much more, if they are openly sensual, vicious, and debauched – then we may take our leave of all the glory and power of religion among the people that are committed to their charge.

To handle this property (or adjunct) of the pastoral office, it would be necessary to distinctly consider and explain all the qualifications assigned by the apostle as necessary for bishops or elders, evidenced as necessary prior to the orderly call of them to this office;<sup>1</sup> but it is not consistent with my present design to engage in this work.

These are some instances of the things in which the office-duty of pastors of the church consists. They are but *some* of them; and these only proposed, not pursued and pressed with the consideration of all those particular duties, with the manner of their performance, way of management, motives and enforcements, defects and causes of them. That would require a large discourse. These may suffice for our present purpose; and we may derive from them the ensuing brief considerations:

**1.** A due meditation and view of these things, as proposed in the Scripture, is enough to make the wisest, the best of men, and the most diligent in the discharge of the pastoral office, cry out with the apostle, “Who is sufficient for these things?” This will make them look well to their call and

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<sup>1</sup> **1Tim 3:2** A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; <sup>3</sup> not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; <sup>4</sup> one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence <sup>5</sup> (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); <sup>6</sup> not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. **Titus 2:6** Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, <sup>7</sup> in all things showing yourself *to be* a pattern of good works; in doctrine *showing* integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, <sup>8</sup> sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. <sup>9</sup> *Exhort* bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all *things*, not answering back...

entrance into this office, as that alone which will bear them out and justify them in undertaking it. For no sense of insufficiency can utterly discourage anyone in undertaking a work which he is assured that the Lord Christ calls him to. For where Christ calls us to a duty, he gives competent strength to perform it. And when we say, under a deep sense of our own weakness, “Who is sufficient for these things?” he says, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

2. Although all the things mentioned, plainly, evidently, and undeniably, belong to the discharge of the pastoral office, yet in point of fact, we find by the [lack of] success, that they are very little considered by most who seek after the office. And the present ruin of religion in all places, as to its power, beauty, and glory, arises principally from this cause: that multitudes of those who undertake this office are not in any measure fit for it, nor do they either conscientiously attend to, or diligently perform, the duties that belong to it. It ever was and ever will be true in general, “Like priest, like people.”

3. An account is to be given of this office and of its discharge at the last day to Jesus Christ. The consideration of this had a mighty influence on the apostles themselves and all the primitive pastors of the churches. It is frequently proposed to us, and many warnings are given to us in the Scripture. Yet it is apparent they are but few who take it into due consideration. In the great day of Christ’s visitation, he will proceed on such articles as those laid down here, and others that are expressed in the Scripture, and not at all on those which are now inquired upon in our episcopal visitations. And if they may be reminded of their true interest and concern while they possess the places they hold in the church, without offense, then I would advise them to conform their inquiries in their visitations to those which they must know the Lord Christ will make in the great day of his visitation, which approaches. I think this is only reasonable. In the meantime, for those who desire to give up their account with joy and confidence, and not with grief and confusion, it is their wisdom and duty to continually bear in mind what the Lord Christ requires of them in the discharge of their office. To take benefices,<sup>1</sup> to perform legal duties, by themselves or others, is not fully compliant with what pastors of churches are called to.

4. It is also obvious from this how inconsistent it is with this office, and the due discharge of it, for any one man to undertake the relation of a pastor to more churches than one, especially if they are distant from one another. This is an evil like that of *mathematical prognostications at Rome – always condemned and always retained*. But one view of the duties incumbent on each pastor, whose diligent performance he is to give an account of at the last day, will discard this practice from all approval in the minds of those who are sober. However, it is as good to have ten churches at once, as to have but one, if the duty of a pastor towards it is never discharged.

5. All churches may do well to consider the weight and burden that lies upon their pastors and teachers in the discharge of their office, so that they may be constant in fervent prayers and supplications for them; as also to provide what lies in them to provide, so that these pastors and teachers may be without trouble and care about the things of this life.

6. [It may be objected,] “There are so many duties necessary to the discharge of this office, and of such varied sorts and kinds, as to require various gifts and abilities for their due performance. It seems very difficult to find them coinciding in any one person in any considerable degree, so that it is hard to conceive how the office itself should be duly discharged.” I answer,

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<sup>1</sup> Benefice: an endowed church office giving income to its holder.

(1.) The end both of the office and of its discharge is the due edification of the church; this, therefore, gives them their measure. Where that is attained, the office is duly discharged, though the gifts by which men are enabled for it are not eminent.

(2.) Where a man is called to this office, and applies himself sincerely to the due discharge of it, if he is evidently defective with respect to any special duty or duties of it, that defect is to be supplied by calling to his assistance in office any other who is qualified to make that supply to the edification of the church. The same must be said concerning those pastors who, through age or bodily weakness, are disabled from attending to any part of their duty; for the edification of the church is still what, in all these things, is first to be provided for.

7. It may be asked, what is the state of those churches, and what relation should we have with them with respect to communion? Their pastors are evidently defective in these things or neglectful, if they are not attended to in any competent measure. And we may, in particular, instance the first and last of the pastoral duties insisted on before. Suppose a man is in no way able to preach the word for the edification of those that are pleaded to be his flock? Or having an ability, yet he does not, or will not, give himself to the word and prayer? Or he will not labor in the word and doctrine to the great prejudice of edification? And suppose the same person is openly defective as to having an exemplary conversation? Or to the contrary, he lays the stumbling-block of his own sins and follies before the eyes of others? What shall we judge about his ministry, and of the state of that church of which he is a constituent part as its ruler? I answer:

(1.) I do not believe it is in the power of any church to really confer the pastoral office, by virtue of any ordination whatever, to any who are openly and evidently destitute of all those previous qualifications which the Scripture requires in those who are called to this office. There is, indeed, latitude to be allowed in judging them in times of necessity and great penury of able teachers, so that persons in holy ministry intend the glory of God and the edification of the church according to their ability; but otherwise there is a nullity in the pretended office.

(2.) Where any such persons are admitted, through ignorance or mistake, or the usurpation of undue power over churches in imposing ministers on them, there is no absolute nullity in their administrations until they are discovered and convicted by the rule and law of Christ. But if, on evidence of it, the people voluntarily adhere to such men, then they are partakers of these men's sins, and they do what lies in them to unchurch themselves.<sup>1</sup>

(3.) Where such persons are by any means placed as pastors in or over any churches, and there is no way for their removal or reformation, then it is lawful, and it is the duty of everyone who takes care of his own edification and salvation, to withdraw from the communion of such churches. He should join with those churches in which edification is better provided for. Because this is the sole end of churches, of all their offices, officers, and administrations, it is the highest folly to imagine that any disciple of Christ can be or is obliged, by Christ's authority, to abide in the communion of such churches, without seeking relief in the ways of Christ's appointment, in which that end is utterly overthrown.

(4.) Where most churches in any kind of association are headed by pastors who are defective in these things, all public church-reformation is morally impossible. It is the duty of private men to take care of their own souls, let churches and churchmen say what they please.

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<sup>1</sup> To *unchurch* is to separate from the church; to excommunicate, or withdraw from communion with them.

Here are a few things which may still be inquired into with reference to the office of a pastor in the church:

**1.** *Whether a man may be ordained a pastor or a minister, without relation to any particular church, so as to be invested with official power?* It is usually said that a man may be ordained as a minister to the church catholic, or he may be ordained to convert infidels, even though he is not related to any particular flock or congregation. I will not at present discuss various things about the power and method of ordination which influence this controversy; I will only speak briefly to ordination itself,

(1.) It is granted that a man *endowed with spiritual gifts* for the preaching of the gospel may be set apart *by fasting and prayer* to that work, when he may be orderly called to it in the providence of God; for,

[1.] Such a man has a call to it materially in the gifts which he has received, which warrants him to exercise those gifts for the edification of others as he has occasion.<sup>1</sup> Setting him apart to an important work by prayer is a moral duty, and useful in church-affairs in a special way.<sup>2</sup>

[2.] A *public testimony* to the approval of a person undertaking the work of preaching is necessary,

*1st.* To the *communion of churches*, so that he may be received in any of them on occasion; such were the letters of recommendation in the primitive church.<sup>3</sup>

*2dly.* For *the safety of those* among whom this man may exercise his gifts, so they are not imposed on by false teachers or seducers. Nor would the primitive church allow, nor is it allowable in the communion of churches, for any person to undertake to constantly preach the gospel if he is not testified to, sent, and warranted in this way.

(2.) Such persons who are *set apart and sent* in this way, may be regarded as ministers in the general notion of the word, and they may be useful in the calling and planting of churches, in which they may be instated in the pastoral office. This was originally the work of evangelists; but the office being ceased in the church (as proved elsewhere), the work may be supplied by persons of this sort.

(3.) No church whatever has power to *ordain* men ministers *for the conversion of infidels*. Since the cessation of extraordinary officers and offices, the care of that work is devolved

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<sup>1</sup> **1 Pet 4:10** As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. **1Cor 14:12** Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel.

<sup>2</sup> **Acts 13:1** Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. <sup>2</sup> As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." <sup>3</sup> Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.

<sup>3</sup> **1Cor 16:3** And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. **2Cor 3:1** Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you? **3John 1:9** I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.



merely on the providence of God, being left outside the bounds of church-institutions. God alone can send and warrant men for undertaking that work; nor can any man know or be satisfied in a call to that work without some previous guidance of divine providence leading him to it. Indeed it is the duty of all the ordinary ministers of the church to diffuse the knowledge of Christ, and of the gospel, to the heathen and infidels among whom, or near to whom their habitation is thrown. They have all manner of divine warrant for doing so, as many worthy persons have done effectually in New England. It is the duty of every true Christian who may be thrown among them by the providence of God, to instruct them according to his ability in the knowledge of the truth. But it is not in the power of any church, or any sort of ordinary officers, to ordain a person to the office of the ministry for the conversion of the heathen, prior to any designation to it by divine providence.

(4.) No man can be properly or completely ordained to the ministry, unless he is ordained to a determinate office, such as a bishop, elder, or pastor. But no man can be this unless he is ordained in and to a particular church; this is because the contrary practice,

[1.] Would be contrary to the constant practice of the apostles, *who ordained no ordinary officers* except in and to particular churches, which were to be their proper charge and care.<sup>1</sup> Nor is there mention of any ordinary officers in the whole Scripture except those who were fixed in the particular churches to which they were related;<sup>2</sup> nor was any such practice known or heard of in the primitive church. Indeed,

[2.] It was *absolutely forbidden in the ancient church*, and all such ordinations were declared null, so as not to communicate office-power or give any ministerial authority. So it is expressly in the first canon of the council of Chalcedon, which decreed, “That all imposition of hands in such cases is invalid and of no effect.” Indeed, there were so exact and careful in this matter that if anyone, for any just cause, as he judged himself, left his particular church or charge, they would not allow him to bear the name or title of a bishop, or to officiate occasionally in that church, or anywhere else. This is evident in the case of Eustathius, a bishop of Pamphylia. This good man resigned his charge upon finding that discharging his office was very troublesome. This was because his secular businesses encumbered it, and much opposition and reproach had befallen him from the church itself. And so, of his own accord, he laid down his charge; the church chose Theodorus in his place. But afterward, although he had left his charge, he desired to retain the name, title, and honor of a bishop. To this end, he petitioned the council of Ephesus. In mere commiseration to the old man (as they expressed it), they condescended to his desire for the name and title – but *not* as to any office-power, which they judged is related absolutely to a particular charge.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Acts 14:23** So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. **Titus 1:5** For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.

<sup>2</sup> **Acts 20:28** "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. **Phil 1:1** Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons; **Rev 2:2** "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

<sup>3</sup> Epist. *Conc. Ephesians* 1, ad Synod. in Pamphyl.

[3.] Such ordination lacks an *essential constitutive cause*; and it lacks part of the collation of office-power, which is the election of the people; therefore it is invalid. See what has been proved before to that purpose.

[4.] Bishop, elder, and pastor are terms of relation; making someone such without having any relation to a church, people, or flock, is to make him a father who has no child, or a husband who has no wife, a *relate* without a *correlate*, which is impossible, and it implies a contradiction.

[5.] It is inconsistent with the whole *nature* and *end* of the pastoral office. Whoever is duly called, set apart, or ordained to that office, therein and thereby takes on himself the discharge of all the duties belonging to it, and he is obliged to attend diligently to them. If then, we consider what was proved before as belonging to this office, then we find that not the least part of this office, scarcely anything of it, can be undertaken and discharged by those who are ordained absolutely, without any relation to particular churches. It is irregular for anyone to commit an office to others, and not charge them at the same time with all the duties of that office, and with their immediate attendance to them; it is also irregular for anyone to accept an office and office-power, not knowing when or where to exert the power or perform the duties of it. In particular, ruling is an essential part of the pastoral office, which they cannot attend to if they have no one to rule.

2. *May a pastor remove from one congregation to another?* This is something the ancient church also made great provision against; for when some churches were increased above others in members, reputation, privileges, and wealth, it became an ordinary practice for the bishops to design and endeavor to obtain their own removal from a lesser benefice to a greater benefice. This is so severely interdicted<sup>1</sup> in the councils of Nice and Chalcedon that they would not allow a man to be a bishop or presbyter in any other place except the church in which he was originally ordained. Therefore, if anyone removed themselves, it was decreed that they be sent home again, and abide there, or else cease to be church-officers.<sup>2</sup> Pluralities, as they are called, and openly contending for ecclesiastical promotions, benefices, and dignities, were then either unknown, or openly condemned.

Yet it cannot be denied that there are just causes for removing a pastor from one congregation to another. Because the end of all particular churches is to promote the edification of the church catholic (in general), then in any special instance where such a removal is useful to that end, it is equal that it should be allowed. Cases of this nature may arise from the consideration of persons, places, times, and many other circumstances that I cannot insist on in particular. But so that such removals may be done without offense, it is required that they be,

- (1.) With the free consent of the churches concerned;
- (2.) With the advice of other churches, or their elders, with whom they walk in communion. And there are many examples in primitive times of the removal of bishops or pastors from one church to another in an orderly manner, by advice and counsel, for the good of the whole

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<sup>1</sup> [Interdict: to command against; prohibit or forbid.](#)

<sup>2</sup> Conc. Nicae. can. 15, 16; Chalced., can. 5, 20.

church. Such was the removal of Gregory Nazianzen from Casima to Constantinople; though I acknowledge it did not have good success.<sup>1</sup>

**3. *May a pastor voluntarily, or of his own accord, resign and lay down his office, and remain in a private capacity?***

This also was judged inconvenient, if not unlawful, by the first synod of Ephesus, in the case of Eustathius. He was, as it appears, an aged man, one that loved his own peace and quietness, and who could not well bear the oppositions and reproaches which he met with from the church, or from some in it. On that basis, solemnly, on his own judgment, and without advice, he laid down and renounced his office in the local church, which then chose a good man in his place. Yet the synod condemned this practice, and with weighty reasons, they confirmed their judgment.

Yet no general rule can be established in this case; nor was the judgment or practice of the primitive church precise in this. Clemens, in his epistle to the church of Corinth, expressly advised those who were the occasion for disturbances and divisions in the church, to lay down their office and withdraw from it. Gregory Nazianzen did the same thing at Constantinople. He protested openly that although he was innocent and free from blame (as he truly was, and one of the greatest men of his age), yet he would rather depart or be thrown out than not to have peace among them; he did so accordingly.<sup>2</sup> Afterward, a synod at Constantinople under Photius, concluded that in some cases self-removal is lawful (can. 5). Therefore,

(1.) It does not seem lawful to do so merely on account of *weakness for work* and labor, even though it is occasioned by age, sickness, or bodily distemper. For no man is obliged in any way to do more than he is able with the regular preservation of his life; and the church is obliged to be satisfied with the conscientious discharge of whatever abilities a pastor has, otherwise providing for itself in what is lacking.

(2.) It is not lawful merely because of a *weariness of and despondency under* opposition and reproaches; a pastor is called and obliged to undergo these for the good and the edification of the flock, and not to faint in the warfare to which he is called.

These were the two reasons given by Eustathius at Perga, and which were disallowed in the council at Ephesus. But,

(3.) It is lawful where there is *such an incurable decay of intellectual abilities* that a man can discharge no duty of the pastoral office to the edification of the church.

(4.) It is lawful in case of *insurable divisions* in the church, constantly obstructing its edification, and which cannot be removed while such a person continues in his office, even though he is in no way the cause of them. This is the case in which Clemens gives advice, and of which Gregory gave an example in his own practice.

But this case and its determination will hold only where the divisions are incurable by any other ways and means. For if those who cause such divisions may be thrown out of the church, or if the church may withhold communion from them, or if there are divisions into fixed parties and principles, or opinions or practices, and they may separate into distinct communions – then

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<sup>1</sup> In 379, the synod at Antioch, under archbishop Meletios, asked Gregory to go to Constantinople to convince that city to embrace Nicene orthodoxy. He gave five discourses on Nicene doctrine, explaining the nature of the Trinity and the unity of the Godhead, against the *Arian* and *Apollinarian* heresies (*subordinationism* and *monophysitism*).

<sup>2</sup> Orat. 52, et Vit. Greg. Nazian.

in such cases, this remedy of the pastor laying down his office, is not to be used. Otherwise, all things are to be done for edification.

(5.) It may be lawful where the church is *wholly negligent in its duty*, and persists in that negligence, after admonition, in providing according to their abilities for the outward needs of their pastor and his family. But this case cannot be determined without the consideration of many particular circumstances.

(6.) Where all or many of these causes concur, so that a man cannot cheerfully and comfortably continue in the discharge of his office, there is no such grievous yoke laid by the Lord Christ on the necks of any of his servants, that such a person may not peaceably lay down his office in that church. This is especially so if he is pressed *in a point of conscience*, through the church's noncompliance with their duty in regard to any of the institutions of Christ. And if the edification of the church, which is at present obstructed, may be provided for in this manner, in their own judgment, then he may remove himself. He may either abide in a private station, or take the care of another church in which he may discharge his office (still being able) to his own comfort and their edification.