

Ordination: A Protestant Stronghold Among Baptist Churches

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At the risk of creating a straw man, and realizing the diversity of practice that exists among Bible-believing Baptist churches, I want to preface this article with a description of a typical Baptist ordination service — at least in terms of my experience:

A man who is to be ordained has acknowledged his surrender to a divine call and his desire to preach the Gospel. He has passed through a period of Bible training and has gained some practical experience along the way. He is judged by others as now ready to be ordained.

An ordination council, comprising several ordained ministers, is called for. These ministers privately interrogate the candidate by asking him questions relating to his call, his character, his qualifications, and his doctrine. Then, having judged the man to be suitably qualified, the council reports its findings and recommendation to the church. As a matter of formal church business, a vote to proceed with the candidate's ordination is taken.

The ordination service itself is usually a very special meeting. Often conducted in the presence of distinguished guests, the meeting is filled with curiosity, anticipation, and the singing of praises to God. The candidate may undergo some additional (public) questioning, and he and his wife are usually asked to give their testimonies. A charge is preached by one of the pastors (often from II Timothy 4:1-5). Then the candidate is asked to kneel at the front of the meeting while the preachers of the ordination council gather around him, lay hands on him, and pray for him. The candidate arises ... as an ordained minister of the Gospel.

The man thus ordained is considered ordained for life. In fact, at some point in the proceedings he is usually asked the question: "If you ever cease to believe the doctrines that today you said you believe in, will you turn in your ordination papers?"

As long as he remains true to the Word of God, his ordination stands. Even if he moves on to another church or another field of evangelism, he is not ordained again. Most Baptists view ordination as a credentialing act or an investiture or sorts, whereby a man is accorded the status of an ordained minister and admitted to the ranks of the ministry.

How does this scenario line up with the Word of God? For Bible-believing Baptists, that is ever the critical question. It is not a matter of tradition — it's a question of truth!

Some Baptists have struggled with the whole concept of ordination — asking, in view of the great Baptist distinctives of “soul competency” and the “priesthood of believers,” whether there should even be such a thing. These doubts, however, are answered by two New Testament Scriptures:

“And when they had ORDAINED them ELDERS in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” — Acts 14:23.

“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ORDAIN ELDERS in every city, as I had appointed thee” — Titus 1:5.

The word “ordain” (or “ordained”) occurs in the New Testament 22 times, and is used in a variety of ways. However, these two references clearly teach that elders (pastors, bishops) are to be ordained in ALL the churches.

The purpose of this article is to examine and determine what the Bible teaches concerning ordination — specifically as it relates to Baptist churches and the Baptist ministry. The *thesis* of this article is that some of the ordination traditions commonly practiced among Bible-believing Baptist churches are more Protestant than Bible.

THE GENERAL MEANING OF ORDINATION

Our English word “ordain” comes from the Anglo-Norman *ordeiner*, which in turn came from the Latin *ordināre*, meaning to order, to arrange, to set in place. The basic meaning of the word “ordain” is just that — to appoint, to set in order, to establish ... by selecting or choosing.

The Biblical use of the word is no different. To ordain means to **choose**. A comparison of Mark 3:14 (“And he ORDAINED twelve”) with Luke 6:13 (“of them he CHOSE twelve”) shows this to be the case. Choosing, appointing, and ordaining are words that are used interchangeably in our English Bible.

In the two passages that actually refer to the ordination of pastors, two Greek words are translated “ordained” and “ordain” respectively. In Acts 14:23 the word is χειροτονήσαντες (cheirotōnēsantes), which means “to stretch forth the hand for the purpose of giving one’s vote in the assembly,” “by show of hands,” “appoint,” “span with the hand,” to “vote.” (This Greek word is translated “chosen” in II Corinthians 8:19.) In Titus 1:5 the word is καταστήσης (kata-stēsēs), which means to “appoint,” “set in place,” “set in order,” “set in array.” This word is derived from the preposition *kata* (down) + *stēsēs* (from ἵστημι, *istēmi*, meaning to “make stand,” to “stand,” “set up,” “set,” “appoint,” “determine,” or “bring about”).

The meaning is clear. Both etymologically and philologically, to “ordain” means to choose or to elect. Ordination is NOT a ceremony, an induction, a consecration, or an investiture — it is the simple act of a church **appointing** men to an office or ministry.

THE GENERAL PRACTICE OF ORDINATION IN CHRISTENDOM

If scriptural ordination is essentially a vote to appoint or choose a man, where did all the false notions and ceremonial traditions about it come from? To answer this, we turn to history.

As many ancient churches drifted away from the simplicity that is in Christ, the concept of a sacerdotal priesthood began to emerge. It started, first with the division of God’s people into the clergy (*kleros*) and laity (*laos*) classes (in violation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers), then with the further division of the clergy-class into a hierarchy. Finding no supportive scripture for these changes in the New Testament, men such as Cyprian, bishop of Carthage (200-258 A.D.), turned to the Old Testament where there was a mediatorial priesthood. What’s more, the Aaronic priests underwent an elaborate ritual pursuant to undertaking their ministry.

“And the priest, whom he shall anoint, and whom he shall CONSECRATE to minister in the priest's office in his father's stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen clothes, even the holy garments” — Leviticus 16:32.

“For every high priest taken from among men is ORDAINED for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins” — Hebrews 5:1.

Resorting to the OLD Testament for the faith and order of NEW Testament churches is an unwarranted and dangerous practice. It has introduced many corrupting evils into Christendom: notably the errors of the universal church, sacramentalism, infant baptism and a hierarchy of clergy.

In the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox religions, ordination is known as Holy Orders and is considered a sacrament (a means of *grace*). The *cheirotonia*, or the laying on of hands by the bishop, is held as the most solemn moment of the ordination ritual and the essential act in the sacrament, because it is at this moment that priestly power is imparted and the apostolic connection is made. From that point, the priest is able to act in the person of Christ and to administer the sacraments. Ordination is seen as an indelible mark conferred upon those who enter an exclusive society of clergy.

The rite of ordination as practiced by most of the Protestant daughters of Rome finds its roots in their Catholic heritage. Protestants may have moved in a “back to the Bible” *direction*, but in most mainline denominations ordination continues to be the ceremonial initiation of someone into the ministry, and ordained ministers are the ones considered qualified to minister the Word of God and the sacraments.

Ancient Baptists were sometimes called Acephali, which means “headless.” Their enemies called them this because they refused to adopt any form of ecclesiastical hierarchy. Baptists had their pastors, but they were seen Biblically as the shepherds, rulers, and guardians of individual congregations. In the 17TH century, English Baptists avoided the word ordination altogether — preferring words such as “set apart” and “appointed” when referring to their leaders. Over time, however, the influence of Protestant (particularly Calvinistic) thought led many Baptists to adopt more formal ways to credential their ministers.

Protestant thinking has always been the bane of Bible-believing Baptists. The notions of a circumscribed, life-tenured, “ordained ministry” and the necessity of a ceremonial component to ordination are more Protestant than Bible. This is why most Baptist ordination certificates (incorrectly) state that the man is ordained to the GOSPEL MINISTRY rather than to the office of pastor. It is CHRIST Who puts a man into the ministry (I Timothy 1:12); a church puts him in the office.

Many years ago I remember being told about George Beauchamp Vick (1901-1975), pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan, for 40 years, and founding president of Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. It was quite a marvel to some that he was **never** ordained! After all, he was such a great preacher and a wonderful pastor — how could this be? What was meant by this was that Vick *never* had a group of ordained preachers lay hands on him. So, was he ordained or not? Let's see.

THE TRUE MEANING OF ECCLESIASTICAL ORDINATION

Edward T. Hiscox sets forth the following primary propositions that accurately reflect the New Testament doctrine of ordination as it applies to pastors:

“PROP. I. That the ordination of the New Testament was an *election*, or appointment, to the ministerial office, and not a ceremonial *setting apart*, or consecration to that office.

“PROP. II. That there is no proof in the New Testament that persons chosen to the office of elder, pastor or bishop in the apostolic churches were designated for, or inducted into, that office by any formal service or ceremony whatever.

“PROP. III. That, though the laying on of hands was common on many occasions, as an ancient Oriental Jewish and early Christian form of blessing, especially in the bestowment of the gifts of the Spirit, yet there is neither precept nor precedent in the New Testament to require its use in the ordination of Christian ministers.” [Hiscox, E. T., *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1970, Kregel Publications: Pg. 345. (Now published under the title *Principles & Practices for Baptist Churches*)

Ordination, then, is an election. It is the deliberative vote of a church body to appoint a man to the office of pastor — something that can be done without ceremony in a regular business meeting.

The two scriptures actually relating to the ordination of pastors (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) are set in the context of *organizing* all the churches planted through the evangelistic efforts of Paul and his fellow laborers.

Question: What was needed to “set in order” these assemblies of baptized believers? The answer is leadership, scriptural leadership — and scriptural leadership is always provided through the pastors of a church (I Thessalonians 5:12; I Timothy 5:17; I Peter 5:2-3).

Question: Were the elders who pastored the churches in Pisidia and Lycaonia, and later on in Crete, first chosen and appointed by Paul and Barnabas (and later by Titus) — then *imposed* upon those respective churches? To answer “yes” would support the notion that clergymen are ordained by bishops (the Catholic way). Baptists, however, hold to the truth that ecclesiastical authority resides in each church (Matthew 18:17-18).

Undoubtedly Paul, Barnabas, and Titus *saw to it* that elders were set in the churches they organized, for that is part of the work of an evangelist. But before that could take place, the men who became elders must first have been called of God into the ministry, then trained for the ministry, then chosen by the congregations (no doubt under the guidance of the evangelists) for the office of elder.

When a mission is organized into an independent Baptist church, the first two decisions made should be: (1) the vote to organize (often accomplished by the unanimous signing of the charter), and; (2) the vote to ordain (appoint, choose) a pastor.

What about the Laying on of Hands?

As Hiscox correctly observed, there is no hint of any ritual or ceremony being connected with the ordaining of elders in either Scripture. The “cheirotoneōsantes” was not the laying *ON* of hands, but the *RAISING* of hands (in affirmation).

So exactly what does the “laying on of hands” signify?

In the Old Testament, the act signified either the imparting of a **blessing** (Genesis 48:14) or the **identification** with something. Jewish priests laid hands upon the heads of animals about to be sacrificed, signifying their identification with that sacrifice (thereby symbolically declaring: “This is what I deserve, but an innocent sacrifice is taking my place”).

In the New Testament, the laying on of hands also signified a benediction (Matthew 19:13-15), and it was also occasionally associated with the sign gift of healing (Acts 28:8) and the [temporary] apostolic communication of the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:17-19; 19:6).

When it comes to the Lord’s churches, the laying on of hands was associated with the choosing of deacons by the church (Acts 6:5-6) and a church’s sending forth two of its pastors (Barnabas and Saul) as evangelists (Acts 13:3). In these instances, the laying on of hands (though not prescribed by scripture) was a demonstrative act — seeking the divine *blessing* upon men who have been set apart for special service and the *identification* of that church with their ministry. In the latter case, both Barnabas and Saul had already been actively engaged in the work of the ministry for many years.

An objection to this explanation is often raised on the basis of I Timothy 4:14 and II Timothy 1:6.

“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the LAYING ON OF THE HANDS of the presbytery.”

“Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the PUTTING ON OF MY HANDS.”

Neither scripture actually mentions ordination. What, then, are they teaching? Two things: first, that Timothy *had* a spiritual gift; secondly, that this spiritual gift was imparted through prophecy (preaching) — *not* by the laying on of hands. Putting both of these passages together it seems Timothy was not only converted to Christ through the ministry of Paul, but was also called to preach through the preaching of Paul. Paul undoubtedly recognized God’s call upon his son in the faith and thus laid his hands on him; subsequently, the pastors of the church at Lystra also noticed this gift and calling (see: Acts 16:2).

The laying on of their hands upon Timothy did not impart the gift, but was done in recognition of his gift — and thus was an act of identification and benediction. The Baptist theologian John Gill, commenting on I Timothy 4:14 says: “And since gifts have ceased being conveyed this way, the rite [sic] of laying on of hands in ordination seems useless and of no avail.”

What about I Timothy 5:22? Surely this verse cautions a hasty ordination! “*Lay hands suddenly on no man...*”

Again, ordination is not mentioned here. Hiscox is right on target when he asserts:

“It has usually been taken for granted that the primitive ministry was inducted into office by formal services, and that “prayer with the laying on of hands” was the essential part of such ordination. But this has been accepted as scriptural, not because it is found in the Scriptures, but because Prelatical and Presbyterian authorities have interpreted the Scriptures by their own ecclesiastical usages, rather than adjusted their usages to the New Testament teaching. They have seen Episcopal and Presbyterian ordination in the New Testament because they saw it in their Church standards and practices. Their scholars have largely so interpreted the text, and Baptists have accepted their conclusions without even their justification.” [Ibid. pg. 353]

While it is true that its neighboring context (I Timothy 5:17-20) refers to pastors, the immediate context of the verse charges Timothy with the way he is to carry out the instructions contained in the chapter. “Do nothing by partiality” he is told — especially when it comes to the contentious issues of dealing with the widows of the church (young and old) and to accusations brought against pastors. Do not be quick to take sides.

The significance of the laying on of hands as it relates specifically to the Lord’s churches and the work of the Lord is that it has to do with imparting a blessing and/or identifying with a man’s ministry. Nothing more, nothing less!

THE TRUE PRACTICE OF ECCLESIASTICAL ORDINATION

How should the process of ordination work in a Bible-believing Baptist church?

Ordination is the appointing of a qualified man to the office of pastor. The act is effected by a church vote. Whether it is accompanied by a public meeting of the church designed to make it a notable and memorable occasion is of no great matter. A couple may be lawfully married at the courthouse with two witnesses before a judge, or be wed in an elaborate, lavish “church wedding.” Either way, they are married!

Here are some thoughts on how the Lord’s churches ought to go about ordaining their pastors. To begin with, there are three possible scenarios to consider.

The first is where a new church is being established. In this case, evangelists sent from and by the “mother” church preach the Gospel, baptize the converts, and eventually organize a church. Their labors also include training men who have been called by God into the ministry. Example: During his three-year ministry in Ephesus, Paul and his team not only planted a church in that city, but also trained its pastors (Acts 20:17) and the evangelists that were evidently sent forth to plant other churches in Asia (Acts 19:10).

The second scenario is that of an established church being led by a group of pastors who are in turn training God-called men for the ministry.

The third case is when an established church is bereft of any pastor due to death, disablement, departure, discipline, or congregational decline.

Most things said below will apply to all three situations, but some unusual circumstances may require special treatment:

1. God calls men into the ministry (Acts 9:15). It is neither a chosen nor an inherited vocation. Men thus called *are* preachers. Of course they must be trained and prepared — that is why we often refer to them as “preachers-in-training.” See: II Timothy 2:2; 3:10-11; Titus 2:9.

2. Pastors and evangelists are *gifted* by the Lord Jesus Christ to His churches (Ephesians 4:11). It therefore becomes a church’s responsibility to discern those whom Christ is placing over the body as its shepherds. Ideally, these are men who have been raised up in the church, trained by the pastors of the church, and brought into the office as the LORD directs and leads — thus assuring the church of a continuity of scriptural leadership. The practice of a pastor “hiring” associates from outside sources is not found in scripture.

3. Having had sufficient opportunity to judge a man’s calling, desire, gifts, qualifications, and commitment to Christ, a church can properly vote to elect him as a pastor. By this action he is duly “ordained” and no further steps by the church are required.

When a man has been brought up and trained in his church, he should be well-known and “well reported of by the brethren” by the time he is ready for the pastorate. Any interrogation of the man should be unnecessary (though the church certainly has liberty to publicly question him if it be considered instructive to the congregation).

In the case of a mission work, the training of men and the guidance provided by the church-planting team will be key factors in helping the new church elect its pastor(s).

In the instance of a church having no pastor (and being a spiritually immature body), receiving assistance from pastors of other like faith and order churches can be beneficial and even necessary. These men can examine a candidate and advise the church as to his suitability — acting in an advisory capacity only, and openly conducting their work in the presence of the membership. This should be the *only* time an “ordination council” (not a good term) is called for. It has absolutely no authority over the church that called for it.

4. In keeping with the exact meaning of the word, a church sets apart a man by the simple gesture of its members (or men) lifting up their right hands.

It is a separate matter when men are called away to engage in evangelistic ministry (as in Acts 13:1-3). It is appropriate for the church to publicly identify with them and seek God’s blessing upon their labors by the laying on of hands if it so desires. This can properly be done on behalf of the church by its presbytery (not pastors from other churches) and/or its men.

5. Should a pastor of a church move to another church of like faith and order for the purpose of becoming its pastor (or one of its pastors), the process of scriptural ordination should be repeated. He carries with him no invested right or

authority to simply assume the pastorate of that church. He brings only his calling and his reputation, experience, faith, and God-given abilities. What he yet needs is a vote! I was ordained a pastor by Bethel Baptist Church in Springvale, Victoria, on November 26, 1971 (the traditional way); I was ordained as pastor of Willetton Bible Baptist Church in Willetton, Western Australia, on March 3, 1985 (by vote); and I was ordained (in absentia) a pastor of Bible Baptist Church in Oak Harbor, Washington, on November 16, 1988 (by vote).

6. Since the majority of Baptist preachers have been ordained in the traditional way described at the beginning, what of the validity of their ordination? Thankfully, undergoing the private inquisition of an ordination council and the public laying on of hands (and everything in between) does not invalidate an ordination IF, in the midst of all the pageantry, there was a church vote.)

Ordination is a wonderful thing, and it should never be minimized or scorned. It represents the tenderest care of Bible-believing Baptist churches by their risen Head, Who continually calls and endows faithful shepherds to feed, lead, and give heed to His flocks.

The issue of this article is not about the man so much as it is about the misleading nature of traditional ordination and its tendency to promote denominationalism and a clergy class. Scriptural ordination magnifies the sacred *office* rather than the man — Romans 11:13.

Let us who are called Baptists, who claim to be the people of the Book, examine all our traditions and phraseologies in the full light of divine revelation — lest we, too, slowly drift off into a darkening apostasy that has afflicted so many Baptist churches from the days of the apostles to the present.



The Church: Its Ordination of Officers _____

Hezekiah Harvey
From *The Church*, 1879

Ordination, or the public investiture of church officers with official authority, is clearly scriptural. It is not, however, the ultimate source of ministerial authority. This is found in the call of the Holy Spirit and the election by the church, of which ordination is the public recognition and the completing act.

This act, originally simple and beautiful as seen in Scripture, has been grossly perverted in the hierarchical systems which displaced the primitive church. In the Roman Catholic Church it is a sacrament, conferring the power of transmuting bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, and of remitting or retaining sins; and even among Protestants the conception of a certain magical power conferred by it is often apparent, as if a special, invisible grace were thereby secured. No such thought is found in Scripture.

The word ordain in the New Testament never denotes the ecclesiastical ceremony of ordination. It is used six times in connection with a sacred office, and is in each instance the translation of a different Greek word. Thus, Mark 3:14: "Jesus ordained" (*epoigse*) "twelve to be with him;" Acts 1:22: "Must one be ordained" (*genesthai*) "to be a witness;" Acts 17:31: "By that man whom he hath ordained" (*horise*); I Tim. 2:7: "Whereunto I am ordained a preacher." (*etethen*).

In all these the reference is clearly, not to a formal ceremony of ordination, but to the choice or appointment to a sacred office. Thus, also, Acts 14:23: "When they had ordained (*cheirotoneantes*) them elders in every church and had prayed with fasting," where ordained denotes plainly the act of choice, while the "prayer with fasting" may refer to the formal act

of setting apart to the office; Titus 1:5: "That thou shouldst ordain (*katasteas*) elders in every city," where the word signifies to constitute, appoint, and may possibly include the whole procedure, both the choice and the ordaining ceremony, but with evident emphasis on the former. The New Testament sense of ordain, therefore, is to choose or appoint, and does not necessarily or ordinarily refer to an ordaining ceremony.

Three instances of ordination, or the public setting apart to church office, are found in the New Testament—that of "the seven" (Acts 6:6), "whom they set before the apostles, and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them," that of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:1-3), respecting whom the Holy Ghost said to the ministry at Antioch, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them they sent them away;" and that of Timothy, to whom Paul said (I Tim. 4:4), "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." To these actual cases there is added the injunction given to Timothy (I Tim. 5:22), "Lay hands suddenly on no man" where the reference is clearly to ordination; and the natural inference is that the ceremony was customary in setting apart to the ministry.

The following points are here to be noted:

1. The ministry alone confers ordination. In these examples, apostles, presbyters, and evangelists appear as officiating, but in no instance unordained persons. Special charge is given to the ministry in regard to the character and qualifications of candidates for the sacred office. Paul said to Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also;" and he solemnly enjoins the utmost care in testing their fitness for the work by the charge, "Lay hands suddenly" (hastily) "on no man."

Evidently, the ultimate responsibility of admitting to the ministerial office is here devolved on the ministry itself. They only, therefore, may act in setting apart to the sacred work. This is plainly the scriptural order, and only extreme necessity will justify a departure from it. In the apostolic churches, where each was organized with its own presbytery, there were always those competent to confer ordination.

2. In the ordination of a minister there is an evident propriety in inviting the co-operation of other churches; for it is desirable that he should be recognized as a minister, and should perform ministerial functions outside of his own church. Hence, it is customary to call an ordaining Council. This should be composed, not of select churches, but of all the neighboring churches, that it may properly represent the whole community of churches; no minister should consent to serve in a packed Council.

And as ordination is conferred only by the presbytery, or ordained ministers, the Council should not proceed to ordain without the concurrence of a majority of the ministers composing it; otherwise, it is not the act of the presbytery, and the ordination is not scriptural.

3. The form of ordination is prayer and the laying on of hands, sometimes with fasting these only are the ordaining acts. Other services may, indeed, be connected, such as a sermon, a charge, and the hand of fellowship to the candidate and a charge to the church, as is at present the custom; but these are not essential to ordination. The original form was singularly simple and striking. It consisted simply in the invocation of God's blessing on the person thus called to a sacred work, and a solemn consecration of him to it by the significant act of the laying on of hands.

4. Ordination confers no new grace or power; for the ordained person was chosen to the office because the church saw already in him the grace and power requisite for it. The presbytery, in the ordaining act, gives the solemn public sanction of the ministry to the call of the church, attesting the qualifications of the candidate for the office, and, invoking the divine blessing - consecrates him to it.

This view of ordination is opposed by the theory of an historic succession in the ministry by successive regular ordinations from the apostles. According to this, a two-fold grace is conferred in ordination:

1. The power of consecrating, offering, and ministering the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, and
2. The power of absolution, or the remission of sins. The authority to confer this virtue in ordination is vested in the bishops, by whom it was received from the apostles, and has been transmitted through successive ordinations to the present day. As the result, ordination not received in this regular succession is invalid; and where there is no valid ordination there is no true ministry, no effectual preaching, no sacrament, no church, and no salvation.

To this theory I propose the following objections:

1. The sacerdotal powers, here said to be transmitted through apostolic succession, were never conferred on the apostles, much less have they been transmitted through the ages from them to us.
2. The Scriptures are silent as to any such succession and the necessity of it to a valid ministry; but surely, if this necessity existed, so momentous a fact would not only be stated, but emphasized.
3. Ordination did in fact confer no gift or power, for "the seven" were "full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom" before their election, and were chosen on account of their fitness for the office. Barnabas and Saul were called of the Holy Ghost to the missionary work before their ordination, and that act only recognized this divine call, and dedicated them to their work. The ordination of Timothy was attended with exceptional circumstances; for, when he was ordained, a distinct prophetic utterance predicted his future eminence in the ministry, and Paul, as an apostle, united with the presbytery in the laying on of hands, so that Timothy received the supernatural gift or charism of the Holy Ghost (I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6). But neither prophets nor apostles are now present at ordinations, and the special charisma of the Spirit have ceased in the church.
4. If this theory of apostolic succession be admitted, there is no evidence that a valid ministry now exists on earth; for an historic succession of ordinations from the Apostolic age cannot be proved in any individual case. Even were such a succession promised, it would then be wholly uncertain in which of the several lines claiming it this succession has descended. Archbishop Whately justly said: "There is no Christian minister now existing that can trace up with complete certainty his own ordination, through perfectly regular steps, to the times of the apostles."
5. Finally, it is incredible that God has made the salvation of souls dependent upon this mysterious invisible virtue in the ministry—a condition as to which there is scarcely one chance in a thousand that it is met in any minister in Christendom; and if met, the proof of it cannot be made out. Such a supposition is repulsive, not only to the whole tenor of Scripture, but also to our most fundamental conceptions of God.



The Call to the Christian Ministry _____

Andrew Broaddus, 1838

As printed in *The Baptist Preacher*, February 1846

The subject of our present address may be thus stated, "What may be considered as constituting a scriptural call to the gospel ministry? The subject thus proposed, appears to us to have an important bearing on the well-being of our churches, and the prosperity of religion; and to require, therefore, a proper view and a corresponding action.

To form a just solution of this query, or, in other words, a correct view of this point, is indeed highly desirable; inasmuch as, from the nature of the case, an erroneous decision must be attended with injurious consequences. An ignorant enthusiast, on the one hand, who pertinaciously adheres to his notion of a divine call, will endeavor to thrust himself on the church and the world—confidently intruding where angels might tremble; while, on the other hand, an intelligent disciple, who is diffident of his call to the ministry, will shrink from the undertaking—fearful of running before he is sent. Such will be the

result, on the one hand and on the other, of a mistaken view of this matter, and this consideration furnishes a strong reason for endeavoring to ascertain the truth, as to the question now before us.

The reality of a scriptural call—say, if you please, a divine call, to the gospel ministry, ought not to be questioned, merely because the idea may have been abused, or mistaken views formed on that point. It may be made satisfactorily to appear, nor is it necessary, nor indeed is it proper, in maintaining this point to resort to that often misapplied passage, Heb. 5:4, "No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."—A passage which, (as the connection shows) is referable, not to the gospel ministry, but solely to the high priesthood.

The fact, that there is provision made by the King of Zion, for the sure perpetuation of his church on earth, and for the continuance of the gospel ministry goes to prove as it necessarily involves the reality of a call to this important work—in such a way as he (the King himself) has been pleased to adopt. What that way is, it will be our aim presently to ascertain, and lay before you. But first, notice this guarantee of which we have spoken—this security for the continuance of the church and the ministry. Brief testimony may here suffice.

Hearken then to the prophetic declaration, Dan. 2:44, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed." And hearken to the assurance given by our Lord, in accordance with this prophecy, Matt. 16:18, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The purpose of grace here declared, looks forward through all time, to that glorious consummation, when "the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it." (Isa. 2:2)

The continuance of the church on earth bespeaks, of course, the continuance of the ministration of the Word; and the testimony of Paul assures us of the provision which has been made for this from first to last. Ministers, both ordinary and extraordinary, are represented by the apostle as the gifts of the ascended Saviour. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Ephes. 4:11, 12)

Aware of the peculiarity of the apostolic office, we do not pretend to ground our view of this matter on the vocation of the first twelve, which was the personal act of Christ, in his bodily presence on earth. We do not indeed perceive that it was in any such way, that the elders of the churches were appointed to their office in the days of the apostles. That the apostles, those prime ministers of the King, were invested with authority to proclaim his word and to teach his will independent of church sanction, there can be no question.

They had new facts to publish—new truths to unfold, and a new economy to establish; and they were furnished with miraculous powers, to evince the truth of their mission, and to sustain their high pretensions. If, therefore, any person should now lay claim to a divine commission, infallible and independent of all human sanction, he will have no right to demand our credence, unless he can produce some token or evidence corresponding with that claim:—otherwise, (and we ask particular attention to this point, otherwise) the church may be intruded on by everyone who may take it into his head that he is divinely commissioned to engage in the work of the ministry.

Hitherto we have attended to it on the negative side only. We turn now to the positive, and repeat the query—"What may be considered as constituting a scriptural call to the gospel ministry?"

We here assume that the subject of this call is possessed of genuine piety—the basis of all other requisites in this case; and we remark, that if we can ascertain what are the essential qualifications for the Christian ministry, we shall arrive at a solution of the question, for he that is possessed of these, may be considered (as Mr. Fuller remarks) to be called of God to exercise them. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same," is the divine injunction, "as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Only let him take heed that if he speak, it be according to the oracles of God." (I Pet. 4:10, 11) The question then assumes this form: "What are these essential qualifications, which constitute or evince a call to the gospel ministry? We conceive them to consist of two sorts: Proper exercise of mind, and talents or gifts suited to the work.

First—proper exercises of mind.

There ought to be a desire for this work. The office of a bishop includes the work of teaching, and in regard to that office, Paul mentions a desire as being supposed to exist on the part of the individual. "This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." (I Tim. 3:1) Now it follows that an evangelist—that any person engaging in the work of the ministry, should feel a desire to be so engaged.

It is very probable that this desire may be, in a great measure, quenched, in the hearts of some who ought to have been encouraged, and to have taken courage, to come forth and to go on. But still we say there ought to be a desire for the work. It forms a first principle in the spring of action towards this employment. And we may add that there ought to be a specialty in this desire,—an earnest longing to be thus engaged in the service of "the Captain of our salvation" if so it might be.

It follows that this desire must be of the right sort. The same motives and feelings of heart which actuated an apostle must actuate every minister of the gospel, for both engage in the common cause, and both serve the same Master. Let us then take Paul for a model. Of the nature of his feelings and motives, he himself has fully informed us, and has certified the truth of his professions by his labors and his sufferings. Let him speak:

- "Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death." (Phil. 1:20)
- "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Gal. 6:20)
- "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel, is, that they might be saved." (Rom. 10:1)
- "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." (II Cor. 5:11)
- "For the love of Christ constraineth us." (II Cor. 5:14)
- "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake." (II Tim. 2:10)
- "Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." (I Thess. 3: 10)

These quotations will suffice to exhibit the principles by which this man of God was influenced; to let us see that the glory of God—the honor of the Redeemer—the salvation of dying sinners, and the prosperity of the church, were the objects which inspired his zeal and governed his heart. Such were his principles; and to the influence of these principles it was owing, that he was enabled to say, with the prospect of "bonds and afflictions" before him—"None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24)

While we insist, however, on the exercise of principles such as these, we do not say that the pious and conscientious minister of Christ is exempt from feelings of quite another sort—feelings which too often arise from his own nature, and mingle their muddy streams with the pure fountain of holy and heavenly motives. "This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation." (Ezek. 19:14) But it is of the prevailing principles that we have been speaking. These govern the course and stamp the character of the man.

Nor do we pretend, in holding forth the apostle Paul as the model, that we can present you with a race of ministers (or even with one) who can vie with him in that ardent and unabating zeal—that noble, self-sacrificing spirit, which marked his shining career. But this we say, that the minister who is scripturally called will be found a participant of the same spirit—will aim for the same path, and will follow, though at humble distance, in his footsteps. We may mention here, what indeed has been implied in our remarks, the necessity of an ardent thirst for an increasing knowledge of holy truth—for a right understanding of the mind of the Spirit, as revealed in the volume of inspiration.

But this desire to be personally engaged in the work of the ministry, and characterized, though it may be, by right principles, is subject, as we have before remarked, to be checked, where it ought to have free exercise and be put into operation. Such an effect may arise from an apprehension of difficulties to be encountered and work to be performed, to which there may be a distressing sense of insufficiency. In such a case it is no wonder that there should be a shrinking from

the task, even where there is an earnest zeal of the right character, and an earnest wish to lend a helping hand in carrying on the work of the Lord.

Now, in counteraction to this shrinking disposition, a strong impression may take place, which ought not to be slighted; an impression consisting in a persuasion of duty, duty to go forward, through all difficulties, in the public service of the great Master. This impression then—this conflict between an apprehension of insurmountable difficulties on the one hand, and a sense of duty on the other— may constitute another element in a scriptural call to the work of the ministry.

We have now, brethren, presented to your notice what we consider to be one species of qualifications, appertaining to a call to the gospel ministry. They regard, as we have seen, the exercises of the mind. But these exercises, be it observed, are not to be considered as sufficient of themselves to constitute the call of which we are speaking. They may exist in the absence of other qualifications necessary to the work of the ministry. And this brings us to notice—

The second species of qualifications requisite in this case, namely, the talents adapted to the work.

The possession of such talents is obviously implied in the apostolic requisition—"apt to teach." (I Tim. 3:2; and II Tim. 2:24) Talents are of two sorts—natural and acquired. In order to this "aptness" of which the apostle speaks, there must be some considerable stock of natural talent;—a mind capable of invention, or of forming original ideas, and a faculty to communicate these ideas to others. Pious persons, possessed of but small gifts, may employ them usefully in admonition and exhortation; but to sermonize—to exhibit the gospel in its various bearings, and to explain and illustrate its sacred truths—this is another matter, and requires that talent of a different order be brought into action.

Now, while the individual himself is the judge of his own desires and motives—of all his own exercises of mind, others must judge of the fitness of his talents for the work: and the proper persons for this judgment are those with whom he stands immediately connected, together with any others who, by them, may be called on to aid in such a case. For, as the minister is to be considered in the capacity of servant of the church, it is perfectly fit and proper that his qualifications should be submitted to be thus judged of. From such evidence as the sacred records furnish, we may conclude that this mode of procedure is in accordance with the usage of the New Testament churches.

Under the superintendence of the apostles, and their deputies, the evangelists, the churches appear to have formed their own judgment, and made their selection of their own officers. This judgment of the church may indeed be sometimes erroneous; but fallibility, in the present state of things, is not to be urged as an argument against the course here presented. It appears to commend itself to us as the proper course and the best; and we have no idea that we should be benefited by referring the matter to his Holiness of Rome, though he clothes himself with the mantle of infallibility.

With respect to acquired talents, a small stock may suffice to mark out the person as the subject of a gospel call; but we would not say that a small stock is sufficient to qualify him as a minister of the gospel. There is a distinction to be made between a divine call to the work of the ministry, and a preparation for the work; and an individual (we conceive) may be so far qualified as to give satisfactory evidence, or to induce the persuasion, that he is designated to that work, while as yet he is almost entirely unqualified for its performance. The buds of promise may be discerned in the natural talents of the person, through the medium of a small share of acquired ability; and after a while he may receive the sanction of the church as a probationer, with a view to his improvement in knowledge, particularly in the knowledge of holy truth, by all the means which may be afforded for that purpose.

A man so far qualified,—experiencing the exercises of mind which we have stated, and possessed of the talents which shall be judged suitable for the work, may, in our estimation, be considered as the subject of a scriptural call to the gospel ministry; to be fully invested with the office when it shall appear to be expedient.



Ministerial Gifts to Be Sought Out and Encouraged

American Baptist Publication Society
From *The Baptist Manual*, 1849

Permit us, dear brethren, to ask your attention to a subject, which yields not, in point of importance, to any other connected with your duties and your welfare. We need say nothing concerning the rank which the Christian ministry occupies among the means by which the Saviour's kingdom is to be spread through the earth. Nor need we inform you, that the number of faithful ministers is now inadequate to supply our churches at home, while there are many fields in our own land which are white unto the harvest, and heathen countries appeal to us, by their crimes and miseries, to send them the messengers of salvation.

It appears to us that this deficiency of ministers must be attributed to a neglect of duty on the part of the churches. We cannot suppose that God is inattentive to the wants of his church and of the world, and purposely withholds a competent supply of ministers.

Wrong notions, it is believed, exist concerning the nature of a call to the ministry, and in regard to the duty of the churches to seek out and foster ministerial talent.

We firmly believe that no man ought to enter into the ministry, whom God has not called to the service. But the question is, how is the call of God to be ascertained? That a miraculous intimation of his will is to be expected, no rational man, at the present day, believes. This will must, then, be learned from the feelings which the Holy Spirit produces in the mind of the individual himself; from the gifts of heart and of intellect with which he is endowed; from the course of providence, and from other circumstances.

Two things are necessary to prove a call to the ministry to be from God. The first is that the individual possess a sincere desire to be thus employed. He must feel a strong concern for the glory of God, and for the salvation of men. His heart must be moved with desires to proclaim the love of Christ to dying sinners, and to persuade them to be reconciled to God. He must feel such an impulse of soul towards this point —such a concentration of his thoughts and affections —that he cannot, with a quiet mind, engage in any other employment. He must be willing to part with prospects of emolument, and to forego all worldly advantages, for the sake of his Saviour and of his fellow men. These are some of the feelings which will occupy the heart of a man, whom God designs for the ministry. Of these feelings the individual himself is the only judge, because he alone can determine whether they are sincere, strong and permanent.

But another necessary thing is that he possess suitable gifts. We mean not, that he must be qualified immediately to preach, because no man is qualified to preach with profit, until his mind has been furnished with adequate knowledge, and he has learned how to communicate that knowledge. By suitable gifts we mean a sound understanding, a capacity and a desire to learn, an aptitude to teach, a reasonable degree of ability to be useful to his fellow men as a minister, when his mind shall have been cultivated as much as circumstances may allow.

Of these points, the individual is not a competent judge. His brethren must judge for him. The church has thus a duty to perform. She ought to watch the character and conduct of her young men. An individual, whom God designs for the ministry, will usually show the bent of his disposition, by his zeal for the support of Sabbath schools, by his pertinent exhortations in the conference room, and by his prayers in social meetings. If the ministerial spirit exists within him, it will find occasion to display itself; and in most cases, a church is convinced of the call of a young man to the ministry as soon as he is himself, and sometimes sooner. In such cases as this, it is the duty of pastors, deacons, and other members of the church, to converse with such persons, to inquire concerning their feelings, and to give them all proper encouragement. If

the individuals have themselves been thoughtful and anxious concerning their duty, such an affectionate and judicious conversation may remove their doubts, and confirm their decisions, by bringing in aid of their own convictions, the opinions of their brethren.

It is believed that a very different course is frequently pursued. Young men are left to struggle with their feelings without one word of advice or encouragement. The more modest they are, and therefore the more deserving of sympathy, the more reluctant they are to, disclose their feelings, lest they should be attributed to pride and presumption. Senses of unfitness, the greatness of the work, doubts concerning duty, all throng upon the mind, and often produce inconceivable distress which one word of kind sympathy and advice from a pastor or Christian friend would remove.

Many young men, it cannot be doubted, are overcome by these anxieties, doubts, and fears, and relinquish the thought of the ministry, who ought to preach the gospel. It is a mistake to suppose, that if it be a man's duty to preach, he will force his way through every obstacle. A man may neglect his duty to preach, as he may neglect any other duty; and he is the more liable to neglect this duty, because the conscientious mind will consider it as a far less sin to refuse to preach, though it be a duty, than to preach when it is not. If his doubts preponderate in the smallest degree, the mind of a conscientious man will be very liable to abandon the design; and thus the very best ministers may be lost to the church.

But if a young man surmounts his doubts and discouragements, and makes his case known to his brethren, he is sometimes treated with cold suspicion, and obstacles are thrown in his way on purpose to test the strength of his zeal. If, at last, by dint of perseverance, he forces the church to give him a license, so much time may have been wasted, that it is too late to enter upon the work with advantage.

There may be cases, too, in which a young man may not have thought of the ministry, who may nevertheless furnish evidence of piety, talents and zeal, which would make him useful as a minister. It is undoubtedly the duty of pastors and Christians to converse with such a person, in a judicious manner; to inquire respecting his feelings; to ask him if it is not his duty to preach the gospel; to urge him to reflect and pray on the subject; to invite him to speak and to pray in conference and prayer meetings, and thus give his mind a direction towards the object. No reason can be given, why it is not as much our duty to use the proper means in this case, as it is to persuade a sinner to be reconciled to God; and God may, in both cases, employ us as instruments to accomplish his will.

We think, brethren, that there has been, and still is, a failure in duty, on this subject, among our churches. We earnestly entreat you to think of these suggestions, and let your attention be more directed to the young men among you. Let not selfishness induce you to detain them from their duty. The cause of God needs ministers. Millions of our fellow men are dying every year, without any one to tell them of the love of Jesus. Let, then, every young man in our churches, inquire, with a prayerful heart, Is it not my duty to preach the gospel? Let every church be a faithful and affectionate nursing mother to the young servants to the Redeemer.

But, brethren, have we not neglected the yet more important duty, to pray for an increase of ministers. While we hold fast the belief, that God alone can call and qualify his true ministers, does not consistency, as well as piety, require us to offer continual and importunate prayer, that he will bestow on his churches the inestimable gift of faithful pastors and teachers, and commission a sufficient number of evangelists, who may preach the unsearchable riches of Christ in destitute places and in heathen countries? Our Saviour has said, with special emphasis, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2) Let us henceforth pray more for this blessing, and for help to perform the duty which has been insisted on in this tract. Thus may our efforts accompany our prayers, and God, even our own God will bless us, and grant us the desire of our hearts.



The Design of God in Afflicting Ministers of the Gospel

Stephen Chapin, D. D.

From *The Baptist Preacher*, November 1846

A sermon prepared in June, 1843, on the occasion of the death of his daughter, Mrs. Sarah L. M. Sydnor, wife of Thomas W. Sydnor, but on account of his own declining health never preached.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. (II Corinthians 1:2-3)

The word comfort in this passage, and generally in the New Testament, means something more than merely to soothe, to alleviate misery or distress of mind. It means to cheer, to animate, to give new life to the spirits. By it Paul meant that God imparted fresh courage to himself and Timothy to hold fast their profession, however formidable and appalling might be the evils and dangers before them. This is the kind of help and encouragement which the brethren at Corinth most needed when this letter was written; and it is the same kind of cheering and support which Christians now need, and which they will ever need, till the enemies of the cross are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

For we may be certain that Satan will enlist every agent at his command to dishearten and intimidate the people of God, and do all in, his power to extinguish their zeal and to overthrow their faith. True, for shame, and for policy's sake, the fires of the stake have been quenched. But the world has not become a friend to grace; nor has the arch foe given up his malignant purpose. He has changed his mode of attack, but not his spirit and aim. He now transforms himself into an angel of light, and hopes to gain more by his insidious approaches, than he ever won in open warfare.

It was in view of these facts and dangers, and of the means which God had provided to keep alive the love of believers and to encourage them to persevere in the cause of Christ, even in the face of ignominy and death, that Paul wrote this epistle to the Corinthian church.

The text commences with a sublime thanksgiving. The being whom the apostle thus extols and praises, is the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Paul here, as everywhere else, forgets himself—says nothing about consolations as designed for his personal benefit, nor anything about his manifold tribulations to excite pity on his own behalf; but the sole reason why he designed that all should unite with him in extolling and blessing God was, because all the afflictions and consolations which he experienced in the service of Christ, were designed by his heavenly Father to make him a richer blessing to Zion, by giving him greater power to console and cheer believers while suffering in the same cause.

Our text then teaches that all the sufferings and consolation which ministers experience in the service of Christ are designed to qualify them to promote the consolation and salvation of afflicted believers. This truth may be sustained:

I. From analogy. God in all ages has been wont to bless and to afflict leading men in the community, not to promote their personal good simply, but chiefly to fit them to advance the public welfare. What is thus true in fact is confirmed by the general spirit and language of the Scriptures. They represent God as bestowing and sending trials in such a way that it shall be evident that no one is blessed and no one is afflicted for his own sake. He blessed Abraham that he might be a blessing.

He blessed his posterity that in them all the nations of the earth might be blessed. He blessed the Jews, not to promote their independent national weal, but that among them the knowledge and the worship of the true God might be maintained, and through their agency be ultimately propagated through all the other kingdoms of the world. He blessed Cyrus, though a gentile, going before him, gracing his arms with a continued triumph, giving him the treasures of darkness, and the riches of secret places, not to promote his personal glory as a conqueror; but that he might be the instrument to release his people from their captivity in Babylon, and to restore them to their ancient land. God said to him, "for Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name; I have girded thee, though thou hast not known me, that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides me: I am the Lord, and there is none else." (Isa. 45:4, 6)

For the same reason he brings both good and bad men in high stations into great trials and calamities. Job was tried, to refute the charge that he served God only for gain, and to evince to the world and the powers of darkness that his religion was proof against all the assaults of hell. So, too, to illustrate the folly and sin of idolatry, and to prove that the God of the Jews is the only God in all the earth, the three worthies were cast into the burning fiery furnace, and Daniel into the den of lions.

And on the other hand, Nebuchadnezzar was driven from among men, and made to eat grass like the ox, that he and all proud monarchs after him might know that the most high ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will. Pharaoh was judicially hardened, visited with plagues and overthrown in the Red Sea, that in him God's power might be shewn, and his name declared throughout all the earth. God turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, making them an ensample to those that after should live ungodly. Yea, the fires of hell are kindled up to be seen forever throughout the holy empire of God, as a warning of the evils of rebelling against the throne of heaven.

II. By reasoning from the character of these trials and consolations. The same sort of trouble may be sent on different persons and for different ends. Retributive punishments are designed to be lasting admonitions to the guilty, and proofs of the evils of transgression—such as the endless miseries of the incorrigible—the doom which the justice of a holy God requires to be awarded them. Another class of trials, called corrections or chastenings, God inflicts upon his offending children not to destroy, but to reclaim them from their wandering. If they forsake his law, break his statutes, and keep not his commandments, their heavenly Father will in faithfulness and in holy displeasure visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes. Nevertheless he will not break his covenant with his anointed Son, nor alter the thing that has gone out of his lips, but he will restore his chastened and purified seed, and make them to endure forever as the days of heaven.

There is yet another division of sufferings, called tentative, which God sends upon his chosen people, not to punish them, but to try their graces—the strength of their love, or faith, or patience. These are the afflictions to which the apostle refers in our text. He calls them the sufferings of Christ, because they are the same that he endured through all his ministry. He, himself, has given us an abridged account of them. They arose from want, from neglect, contempt, scorn and temptations of Satan, and cruel persecutions of men. These are the tribulations which abounded in the life of the apostle, and of all the primitive saints. They were generally chosen, and in them they find rich consolations.

Paul well knew, for the Holy Ghost assured him, that in every city bonds and afflictions awaited him. But none of these things moved him. He still went forward, though he was certain that in doing so he must suffer both hunger and thirst, nakedness and buffetings, and have no certain dwelling place; not counting his life dear unto him so that he might finish his course with joy. Sometimes these trials were brought about in the immediate providence of God without any direct agency on their part. But in both cases they bore them gladly. They gloried in tribulations, and counted it all joy when they fell into divers temptations, knowing that they were endured to give proof to the world of the heavenly origin of Christianity, and to make them the more capable of glorifying God in building up his kingdom. These are the different kinds of afflictions, and these the different objects to be gained by them.

Let us remember, my brethren, that it is of high moment for us to gain clear notions of the different purposes for which they are sent, otherwise we may rejoice when we should mourn, and exult when we should lie low in the dust. And let us,

too, scrutinize with all care and solicitude the state of our minds and our course of life at the time when our afflictions came upon us. For in this way generally, we may learn why we suffer them, and of consequence, how we should feel and behave ourselves under them. If they came upon us when we were in joy and constantly employed in our labors as ministers of Christ, when it was our meat and our drink to do his will, and we were glad to spend and be spent in winning souls to God, then we may be sure that they are borne for Christ's sake, and that his consolations will abound in us.

But if we leave our first love, and become worldly and slothful, and prepare for our public services, and preach to secure applause rather than to make known the Saviour's love, and God to chasten us for this declension, and these unhallowed motives, lay us on a bed of sickness, take away our property, or remove our children or companions by death, or let us see the once full tide of our people's affection ebbing away from us, then we may be sure that these our trials are punitive, and that in them God is not arraying us with glory but clothing us with shame before the world. Our feelings then and conduct should vary at different times according to the manifest end for which we suffer.

Whilst the church at Rome justly gloried in their tribulations, for they were sent upon them because they were strong and active, and to make them still stronger and more vigorous, the church at Corinth were bound to bewail their tribulations in deep humility, and contrition, because they were intended to punish them for their riotous conduct before seasons of communion, and for their vain boastings and party contentions. True, James says, "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations." (James 1:2) And it is equally true that Paul said, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous." (Heb. 12:11) Nor is there any contradiction between them. For they had respect to afflictions sent for different ends, and upon believers in different conditions.

James referred to Christians strong in faith burning in love and active in labors, and to trials designed to bring out these graces, and thus to prove that the trial of their faith was in the sight of God more precious than that of gold, being thus found unto praise, and honor, and glory.

But Paul had respect to brethren feeble and slothful in duty, and to chastenings designed to purify, to reform and strengthen. It is true, that in one aspect even these grievous chastening afford ground of consolation; for after they have produced the primary end for which they were sent, humility and correction, grace will make them yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness. But while he suffered them he was full of joy and animation. He knew in whom he had trusted, and felt it to be all honor and privilege to be called to suffer for his sake. He knew, too, the importance of the conflict in which he was engaged, and that victory was his certain heritage.

Paul had the testimony of the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit that he was a child of God. He had the sweet consolations that his sins were forgiven, that Christ loved him, and gave himself for him, that he had given him grace to preach his unsearchable riches among the gentiles, that God was always with him, causing him to triumph in Christ, and by him making manifest the savor of his name in every place, that the church he served was destined to become an eternal excellency and the joy of the whole earth. He believed that all his conflicts with the power of darkness—that his bright visions of future glory—were intended to cause him to desire more earnestly, and to prepare him to enjoy more fully the crown of righteousness laid up for him in heaven.

Yes, it was Paul's faith in his personal interest in the blood and intercession of Christ that made up the grand element in his life, and was the animating principle in his labors and triumphs. With him religion was a great matter, a concern of infinite moment. He ever cherished a deep conviction of his wretchedness and guilt while he was a vile blasphemer of heaven, and a persecutor of the Son of God. He ever remembered, too, that matchless grace which delivered him from the power of darkness, and translated him into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

Hence he relates his wonderful conversion again and again, and ever with the deepest emotions of gratitude and praise. When he repeated it in his epistle to Timothy, he was so carried away with thankfulness and adoring thoughts of the transcendent mercy of God in his behalf, that as soon as he had finished it he breaks forth into this sublime doxology, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory, forever and ever. Amen." (I Tim. 1:17)

Could you persuade him that Christ is not an Almighty Saviour, and eradicate from his heart his belief that his death is vicarious, and that the promised aids of the Spirit are sure, he would at once become another man. Instead of remaining the champion of the cross, and sacrificing everything earthly to sustain its glory, he would sink in despair, giving up all hope of his own salvation and that of the world.

III. By reasoning from their influence, both on ministers and on the Christian community, and first from their effects on ministers in relation to tried believers. The deep experience of ministers in the Christian warfare strengthens their faith, enlarges their views, brightens their hopes of heaven, makes them more pitiful towards poor lost sinners, and more anxious to save them, and greatly increases their love to the Redeemer's kingdom, and their confidence in the appointed means to build it up. Thus they find themselves put in possession of greatly increased qualifications to cheer and strengthen afflicted saints. Now will they not at once conclude that this fitness of character to serve the cause of Zion was brought about for this very end?

At any rate, its possession is their warrant to employ it thus. But they do not need this logical process to convince them of their duty. No, their feelings lead them at once to fly to Christians who are in any trouble. They know that whilst their tribulations are countless in number and degrees of severity, there is but one way of finding relief, and that is by faith in Christ. Paul tells us in our text, that all he suffered and enjoyed in preaching the gospel was to give him ability to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comforts wherewith he himself was comforted.

And what is more natural than that the Christian teacher should recommend to any afflicted member of his flock what he has ever found to be his only support in all his own tribulations. It is when his own relief is most signal, and his own cup most flowing that he is most anxious for others to share with him. The renovated patient is ever eloquent in recommending the remedies which have subdued his own pains and diseases, and brought back to him the glow of health. We all soon become strongly attached to the agent or instrument which we have long tried in every emergency, and which we have never found to fail us.

There is a charm in both men and things which have brought us relief in our greatest extremities. When the battle sword of Washington and the staff of Franklin were recently presented as sacred relics to our national government in Congress assembled, the sight of them brought a vivid recollection of the glories of the revolution. For the moment party contests were forgotten, every eye was suffused, and every heart beat with a purer spirit of patriotism. When David saw the sword with which he slew Goliath, he said, "There is none like that, give it me." (I Sam. 21:9) And he went on with renewed confidence of victory in his own wars with the Philistines.

These trials and consolations of the apostles would greatly cheer and strengthen the brethren. For they were joyfully endured in a cause which they prized above all others; and in building it up, the heralds of the cross were daily waxing valiant in fight, and gaining more and more skill and power in wielding the weapons of their warfare, and paganism with all its abominations was fast retiring before them. Think you that the saints of Paul's day were dispirited and made ready to abandon their efforts to make the Saviour known to the world, and to win over to him fresh converts, by reading Paul's thrilling history of his sufferings, his victories, and his miraculous deliverances from enemies:

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak? who is offended and I burn not?" (II Cor. 11:23-29)

"But thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place." (II Cor. 2:14)

How could it have been otherwise than that these facts should greatly animate the disciples with an assured hope of their own salvation, and with confidence that in the same way the gospel was to be propagated in all nations, to bring them under its saving power. We are ever the most animated and most confident when the cause that lies nearest our hearts is supported by the ablest men, and men, too, who have the same motives to sustain it that we have.

In support of our doctrine we will reason from the less to the greater—from the fact that the afflictions and consolations of ministers have been owned as means in the conversion and salvation of sinners. In proof of this we appeal to the history of the church in the first three centuries. It was then she was most successful in persuading men to renounce the world, and to embrace Christ as their only Saviour. Nor is this strange; for it was then that Christians were the most severely tried, and manifested in the strongest light the pure spirit of the gospel, and its power to sustain them whilst suffering everything that men and devils could inflict. But what thus gave them this unconquerable fortitude, and what made their love to Christ so invincible, were questions which would naturally come over the minds of their persecutors.

For they knew that their founder was in their own estimation, a low born and despised Galilean; that his first ministers were illiterate, taken from the common walks of life, having no worldly greatness to arm them with power. They knew too, that the doctrines which these teachers inculcated shocked the hoary and religious prejudices of the Jews and Gentiles, and waged uncompromising war upon all the interests and pursuits which the lovers of this world most highly value. They, moreover, saw that for the sake of publishing this new religion they turned their backs on the world, and sacrificed everything most dear to man—property, connections, ease, fame, and life itself—that they held on their way unshaken by all the terrors of persecution, and that when they were burned at the stake, or nailed to the cross, or torn on the rack, they spent their last moments in praising God for the honors of martyrdom, and in prayer for the pardon and salvation of their cruellest enemies.

Now they could not account for all this without admitting that Jesus was the Son of God, and the only Saviour of lost men; and that the gospel which wrought such wonders was of heavenly origin. In this way hundreds and millions were convinced of the truth and excellency of Christianity, and therefore, as persecution thinned the ranks of the saints, new converts continued to fill them up till the Roman empire gave up idolatry and embraced the Christian faith as her established religion. And thus it early became a proverb, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. No wonder, then, that this cord of sympathy so efficient in behalf of sinners, should convey into the hearts of tried and suffering professors the joy, and the courage, and the triumphs of their public teachers.

If the trials and temptations of ministers are intended to make them the more useful, then we may infer that corrections or christenings for their defects of character or delinquency in duty are intended for the same purpose. In this class of sufferings, as well as in the former, we may be certain that God designs to make them not simply better men, but chiefly better ministers. The best of them are far from being perfect. Their evil propensities are not wholly subdued. Vanity, or pride, or sloth, or worldliness, or love of fame or power, may greatly hinder their growth in ministerial gifts and abounding in public labors, if not lead them far astray in secular matters.

When a minister once eminently successful in his appointed work gradually declines, and by and by becomes a zealous politician, or a thrifty farmer, or a celebrated author in there classical literature or science, the churches will be ready to say, well he is preparing himself for severe sufferings, and for a bitter cup of grief; for we once thought him to be a minister of Christ, and we hope so still, and therefore believe that God will not let him off in this way, but that he will visit his transgression with the rod, and his iniquity with stripes, and make him return to Zion with weeping and supplication. Peter as an apostle, had noble traits of character, but yet he had his faults. He was hasty and self-sufficient.

When Christ warned him that he would be left to deny him, he vehemently said, if I should die with thee I will not offend thee in any wise. But he did not then know how dangerous it was to trust in his own strength. He was therefore left in the hands of Satan, to sift him as wheat, and permitted to deny his Lord even in profane language. This was suffered not for the good of Peter only, but more for the benefit of the church. Hence Christ said to him, when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. Go tell them when tempted, to look solely to me for succor and support, and relate to them your own

experience as a warning to them not to be vainly confident that they are proof against temptation. Peter, no doubt, was a much more humble and watchful Christian, and a much more useful preacher after his fall than he was before.

Paul too was sometimes chastened to keep down the risings of the lingering remains of pride and vanity in his heart. He could but know his superior genius, and his vast resources of knowledge. He knew too, that he was endowed above his fellows with apostolic gifts and miraculous powers. He had been allowed the peculiar favor of seeing the Saviour's face, and of hearing his voice after his ascension to glory; and had besides been caught up to the third heavens to the paradise of God, and heard unspeakable words—music and language which nothing earthly could reach.

Now was there not a danger that he, possessing as he did, a heart by nature proud and ambitious, would be tempted to exult in these extraordinary endowments and revelations? Hence there was given him a thorn in the flesh—the buffetings of Satan. For this thing he besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from him. But Christ did not grant his prayer; but said: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (II Cor. 12:9) He knew that it would be safest for Paul, and most for the good of the church that it should remain with him, reminding him daily of the reason will it was given him—to prevent him from being puffed up with spiritual pride, and to make him confiding in the power of Christ. And in this Paul acquiesced and said, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (II Cor. 12:9)

Christ says, "I am the vine, and my father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth fruit he purgeth that it may bring forth more fruit." (John 15:1, 2) Though it is a good branch, yet he sees that it has some twigs and foliage that check its fruitfulness. He therefore prunes them off; and though the branch may bleed under the knife, still he knows that in this way it will be made more healthy and more fruitful.

Are trials designed to make manifest for the public good the strength of the graces of believers? Then they should be joyfully endured. It is not enough that we bear them in silent patience, but we should be thankful and rejoice that we are called to suffer them. So did ancient saints. The apostles, after receiving a public scourging before a Jewish counsel, departed from their presence rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. They gloried in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, in imprisonments, and in the spoiling of their goods, deeming it a privilege thus to suffer in honor of their master, and knowing that it was given unto them in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, and for his body's-sake, which is the church.

Nor is this strange, for in this way they best honor God, by reflecting on his wisdom and power and truth and holiness in thus sustaining them whilst suffering in his cause. Besides, he most honored them also; for he thus shewed his confidence in their character, in their attachment to him and to his kingdom, and in their fortitude to endure any tortures that their enemies could inflict upon them.

Those soldiers are the most honored who are sent on the most important and most perilous expeditions. Their general herein strews that he confides in their loyalty, and in their superior skill and courage. The Scriptures say, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ sake, happy are ye, for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." (I Pet. 4:14) Men by their slanders intend to dishonor you; but God for your joyful endurance of them, intends that his own Spirit and glory shall rest upon you.

In view of this subject, we see how important it is that ministers should guard against fainting in the day of trial. This would be inconsistent with their profession, and expose them to just reproach. "Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee and thou art troubled." But what is much worse, if in times of tribulation, they betray any lack of fortitude, or any fear of being overcome, they will not only defeat the design of their trials, but they will also, and that too much more than any other class of men, dishearten the church of God.

It would be as when a standard bearer fainteth in the crisis of battle. Nothing animates soldiers more than to see their colors floating; and if the bearers of them fall or faint, they will be panic struck, and break and flee before the enemy. Every

commander knows that his success depends upon the confidence his troops have in his skill and bravery. Henry the IV, king of France, as he was about to commence the battle of Ivry, addressed his army and said, "Children, if you lose sight of your colors, rally to my white plume—you will always find it in the path to honor and glory." Let us then, my afflicted brethren in the ministry, guard against a course so sinful, so dishonorable and so disastrous.



The Grand Desideratum of the Church: The Powerful Presence of the Spirit _____

John Stock, LL. D.

From *A Handbook of Revealed Theology*, 1883

The Scriptures teach us to regard the presence and influences of the Spirit as comprehending everything that the Church now needs in order to its comfort, edification, and increase. By these she is to grow in personal sanctity and in relative usefulness.

The Church has had two great promises given to her in the two distinct epochs of her history. Before the coming of the eternal Word in human flesh, THE promise by which the faith of holy men was cheered and invigorated was that which had respect to His appearance. This was the object of their dearest hopes and most devout anticipations. This was the theme of the first promise made after the Fall—this was the event which all divine revelations and institutions predicted—and this was the consummation for which "prophets and righteous men" sighed and prayed. But the promise respecting the appearance of the Son has been fulfilled,—"the desire of all nations" hath appeared, and hath for ever perfected the great work of atonement.

And yet the Church has the assurance of a manifestation of God suited to her altered circumstances. The promise on which we have to rest, and the fulfillment of which we should daily desire, is that which has reference to the coming, the presence, and the influences of the Spirit. This is now presented to the minds of the faithful as comprehending all that the Church requires. The manifestation of the Father by the Son is complete; now let the Spirit come to glorify the person and work of the Son. Let Him come in every region, and among the men of every clime, that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." (Luke 3:6)

The PROPHECIES which have respect to the times of the gospel represent them as being specially characterized by the outpouring of the Spirit. "I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit." (Joel 2:28, 29)

Now, according to the Apostle Peter, the fulfilment of this prediction began on the day of Pentecost, and has reference to the times of the gospel generally (Acts 2:16-21). In the same strain is the prophecy of Isaiah, contained in the following passage: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour out My Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the LORD's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." (Isa. 44:3-5). Such is, in short, the general tenor of prophecy in its reference to the last days, or days of the gospel dispensation. The leading prophetic characteristic of these days is the outpouring of the Spirit.

And it is observable that the Apostle Paul, when he wished to give to the dispensation under which we now live a designation by which its superiority to all antecedent economies should be pointed out, styled it THE MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT. "If the ministration of death was glorious, how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?" (II Cor. 3:7, 8) Hence it appears that the glory of the gospel dispensation consists in the fact that it is, in a sense, far fuller than that in which any previous economy had been—the ministration of the Spirit.

And, again, when our Lord was about to leave His disciples, and when He wished to bequeath them an assurance which should comfort them and their successors in all ages, He predicted the advent and presence of the Spirit. These were His words: "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16, 17) Jesus Christ spake of the presence of the Spirit as comprising all that the Church would need for her guidance and comfort. This glorious *Paraclete* was to dwell with the saints in all generations (John 14:16), to be their Teacher and their Guide (John 14:26), to glorify our Saviour and to testify of Him (John 15:26; John 16:14), and to render the labours of the Church effectual to the conviction and conversion of the world (John 16:7-11).

Thus our Lord Himself has taught us to expect everything in the way of spiritual prosperity from the presence and blessing of the Holy Ghost. And He did more than this, for He affirmed that the Church would gain immensely by His own bodily translation to heaven, and by the coming of the Spirit to our earth as His representative. "It is expedient for you that I go away," said He; "for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." (John 16:7)

Now we have never been able to reconcile these facts with the theory which postpones the conversion of the world to the period of our Lord's second coming; which virtually denies the sufficiency of the gospel and the blessed Spirit to establish universally the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and which affirms that the enthroned Redeemer must once more descend to our earth in order to put the finishing stroke to the work of the Holy Ghost.

If the task of convincing the world be assigned to the Spirit, we may be sure He will accomplish it, and if it was expedient that Christ should go away that the Spirit might enter on the discharge of this office, it must be expedient that our Lord should remain where He is as to His visible presence, that the Spirit may complete the work which He has already begun.

If the days of physical miracles were to return, what advantage would accrue to the cause of godliness? Would such prodigies render the proofs of the divine origin of the gospel more conclusive? To suppose that, would be to impugn the validity of the existing evidence; it would be to deny the truth of those memorable words: "They have Moses and the prophets...and if they hear not [them], neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."(Luke 16:29, 31)

Physical miracles never did convert a man, and never will. They afford an attestation of the truth of a revelation, but they have no power to destroy a man's prejudice against the truth revealed. They may convince a man that a certain system of doctrine is supernatural in its origin, but they can never bring a man's affections, and conscience, and will, into harmony with the doctrines and requirements of the gospel. This latter change can only be effected by the power of the Holy Spirit, and until this is done, no saving benefit is enjoyed. If the miraculous attestation of Christianity be sufficient and complete, no important moral end could be gained by the revival of miracles; for what man needs is, not clearer evidence, but a different state of heart. EXPERIENCE demonstrates the truth of these remarks.

No nation has been so highly favoured with supernatural exhibitions of divine power in confirmation of revealed truth as the Jewish people, and no nation has been so distinguished for its hardness of heart. Take an illustration from the Old Testament history. Sinai is covered with the symbols of Jehovah's majesty; the mountain is on fire at the presence of the eternal God; the earth quakes as she listens once more to the tones of that voice which had said, "Let there be light, and there was light," and amid all this terrible magnificence, and almost as soon as the voice which had said, "I am the LORD thy God...Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (Ex. 20:2, 3) had ceased to speak, we find the people worshipping a golden calf, and daring to mingle the wild shouts of their idolatrous mirth with the rolling thunders of the divine presence!

Take another illustration from the New Testament narrative. The Scribes and Pharisees saw most of the Redeemer's miracles, and were even convinced that He did really work those prodigies. But did this change the state of their hearts towards Christ? By no means. They could not deny that He cast out devils; the fact they admitted; but they attributed the miracle to satanic agency. They said, "He casteth out devils" (let the reader mark that concession), "but by Beelzebub, the prince of devils!" Many of those who saw the resurrection of Lazarus went away and gave information against Jesus to the Sanhedrim, and aided in plotting His death! Yes, the very men who had seen the dead restored to life by the power of Christ abetted the conspiracy to destroy Him. And when the Pharisees met in council, they candidly said, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles." (John 11:47); and yet they proceeded to devise measures for His crucifixion.

Let us not be understood, however, as intending to throw any doubt upon the usefulness of the miracles which have been wrought in proof of the truth of the Bible. Those interpositions of divine power were necessary in the first instance to demonstrate the supernatural character of the communication. They were never intended to convert the soul, but simply to prove that word to be from God by which the blessed Spirit has in all ages wrought upon human hearts and consciences. They have afforded all the evidence derivable from such sources which the nature of the case required.

What we require is that the moral natures of men should be brought into sympathy with the revelation already sufficiently proved to be from Jehovah; and this can only be accomplished by a more abundant impartation of the Spirit's grace. This is the grand desideratum of the Church; this is the want of our times. Let us have but this, and the Church will break forth on the right hand and on the left, and her seed shall inherit the Gentiles. Let the Spirit be but poured upon us from on high, "then the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be counted for a forest." (Isa. 32:15)

But we have grieved the Spirit, and therefore He has in measure left us. We have dishonoured Him in His official character as the convincer of the world. Many of our ministers and people have so little faith in His power or intention to fulfill this office in its entirety, that they expect the Son of God to descend once more to achieve the final, the greatest, and the most glorious part of the work. We have tempted Him to leave our labours un-honoured and unblessed by the coldness and apathy which we have displayed in the best of causes; and if better days are to dawn upon the Church, it will be in connection with a return to our first love of the Spirit. We must earnestly invoke His interposition in faith. We must believe that He is both able and willing to revive us; and that if we will but work, our success will be certain.

Churches must awake to the conviction that the times of the gospel are "the last days" (see Acts 2:1-7) of our world and of the Church; and that the economy under which we live is destined to continue till the sounding of the trumpet of God. On us "the ends of the world are come." (See I Cor. 10:11), and no other dispensation of grace will be vouchsafed to man in the present state of being. We need no other; all that is necessary is that the one under which we live should be energetically and trustingly worked.

We have among us that gospel which is pronounced by the highest authority, "the power of God unto salvation." The blessed Spirit has taken up His abode among us for all the generations of time. To Him has been delegated the great work of "convincing the world," through the instrumentality of the truth and the Church. Let the evangelical Churches, for whose edification this book has been written, rise to an appreciation of their sublime destiny. Let them but realize their position, their responsibilities, and their privileges, and we have no fear for the result. "The earth shall be FILLED with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea!" (Hab. 2:14)

And, oh, thou blessed Spirit, thou much injured and dishonoured Comforter, whose personality is denied by many, whose office is turned into a jest by others, and whose love and grace even the true Church has never sufficiently prized, pardon all the sins of Thy saints against thine infinite compassion, forgive their carnality of disposition and conduct, teach us all to value Thy presence and operations as we should do, and let the days of Pentecost once more dawn upon us!



The Object of the Christian Ministry

John Stock, LL. D.

From *A Handbook of Revealed Theology*, 1883

What is the end of your mission? To the achievement of what object have you endured years of preparatory toil? To gain a name? You may gain one. But the most successful method will be to forget yourselves. Is it to cultivate in your church and congregation intelligence? Or to promote general intelligence in the community? This would be a useful work, and the minister of the gospel can contribute much towards such a result. But this is not Christ's commission. It has not been on these subjects that your minds have been agitated with the question of duty.

When, after much prayer, you came to the deliberate conclusion that Christ had a work for you to do in his church, and you, with much trembling, made a solemn covenant with him to do his will, was it that you should render a service of this kind? Was it not that you would do all in your power by preaching his gospel, to save men from sin and its serious consequences? I am confident that each heart responds to the latter. Do you inquire how this is to be done? On this subject a volume might be written? But there is one general principle, which, if rightly understood, and never lost sight of by you, will contribute much to your success.

If you would accomplish a good and great work, act on the principle that you are addressing the gospel to sinners who cannot be saved by mere moral corrections. Men are condemned sinners and need pardon. They are the enemies of God by wicked works, and must be totally changed in their moral dispositions. They are not merely to be made better men, but they must become new men in Christ Jesus. The old doctrine, you must be born again, and except you be converted you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven, should be your grand point. You must see everything in this light and through this medium.

I would not be understood to intimate that the work of the minister terminates with the conversion of his hearers. This is a vicious doctrine, which, though avowed by none, is practically believed by too many, who act as if there was a strait gate, but no narrow way. My object is only to show, that however important it is to train the church in holy living, all efforts are vain if we start wrong. You cannot raise a church, or any portion of its members, from a sinful life, except as they have been converted by the Spirit of God. Do all that is in your power to educate them to a holy life, to invite them to imitate the Saviour; but rest your hope of success on the fact that they have been made alive in Christ.

You will not only find it necessary to have distinct views on this subject yourselves, and to keep them habitually before your own mind, but you will need to carefully enlighten the people on this point, and so to hold these doctrines before their minds, that they cannot lose sight of them. The greatest evil which has ever befallen Christianity has been the neglect of this doctrine. The line of demarcation between the converted and the unconverted has often been obliterated. Seriousness has been taken for piety; a profession, for faith in Christ; submission to the ordinances, a fulfillment of the conditions of salvation. In the administration of the ordinances, and in the reception of members to the church, while you should exercise the most tender Christian charity, you should also direct a discerning and searching eye to the religious affections, which are the fruits, and so the proofs, of the presence of the Spirit of God. Be not deceived; you cannot gather figs of thistles. You might as well attempt to educate a dead man, as to train an unconverted church to pious living.

These three points, therefore, I wish, brethren, to fix in your minds. It will require habitual progress in knowledge to sustain yourselves as preachers. Your studies, though not confined to theology proper, should have a concentrated bearing upon the duties of the ministry. And lastly, labor to secure the conversion of sinners to God, by faith in Christ, as the first step in religion, and as laying the only foundation for successfully training a church in practical piety. He who labors to make the people of his charge godly in life, before their hearts have been renewed by the grace of God, will do as little execution as he who explodes powder upon the surface of a rock. The heart must be penetrated by the Spirit and Word of God.

