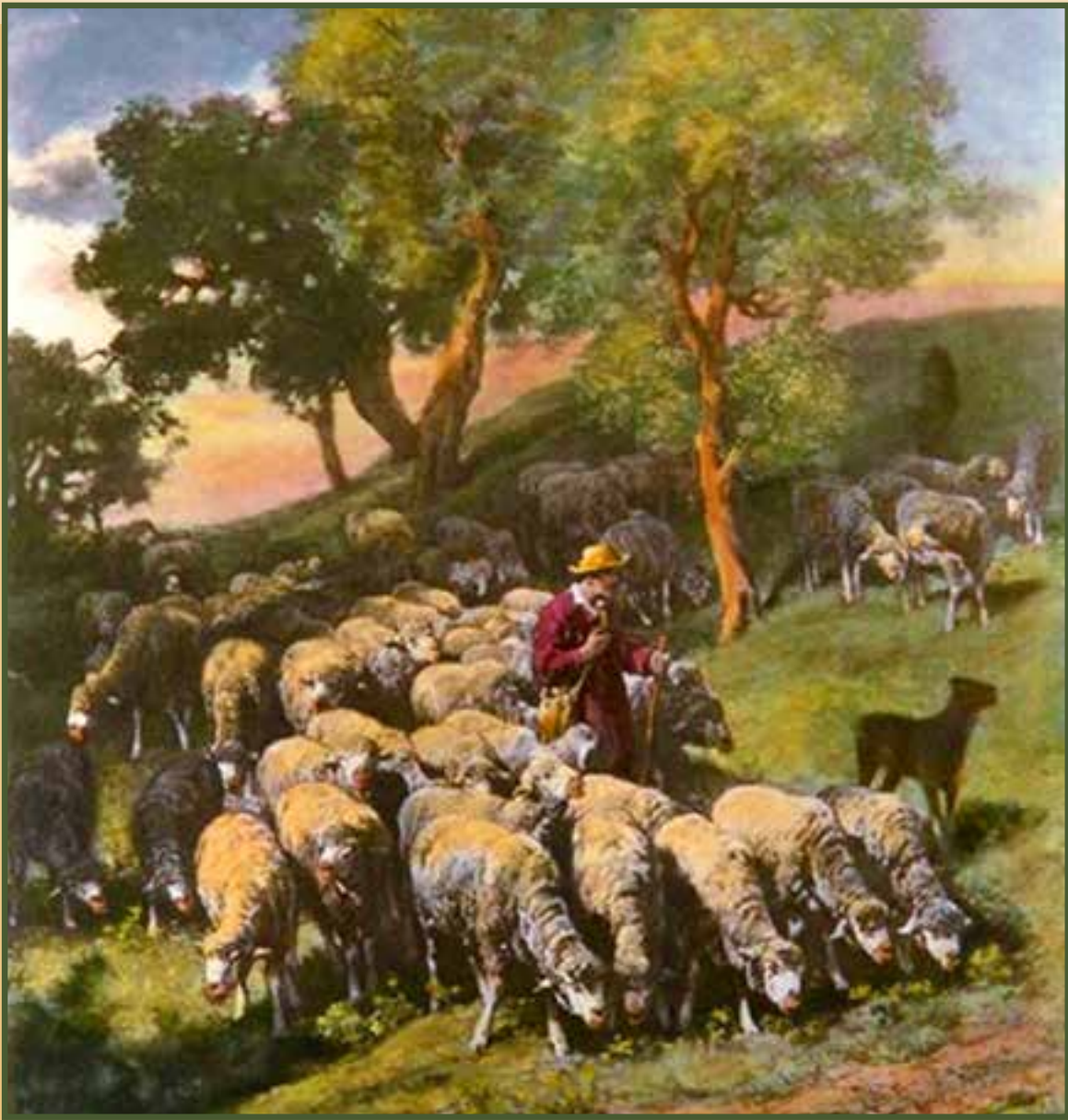


BIBLICAL ELDERS AND DEACONS



NEHEMIAH COXE (D. 1688)

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BIBLICAL ELDERS AND DEACONS

*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 general design and scope of these words is obvious to the observation of every one that reads them. The great apostle of the Gentiles had with good success labored in preaching the gospel to the Cretans; and being himself removed from them, after he had as a wise master-builder laid the foundation of many churches of Christians in Crete, he left Titus among them to build thereupon. While he was resident there, Paul sends this epistle to him to remind him of that service for Christ in His churches that he had left upon his hands; whereby he does not only quicken him¹ to his work, but also furnishes him with full and clear directions for the right management thereof.

I. Exposition

A. General: Set in order the things that are lacking

In the account that our text gives of the reason for which Paul left Titus in Crete, the service that he was there to be employed in is set down in more general and comprehensive terms: that he should set in order the things that were lacking (Ti 1:5). That which we have to do in the first place is briefly to open to you what needs explication² in the words.

The Greek word ἐπιδιορθώση, which is rendered “set in order,” is nowhere else used in the New Testament, nor in the version of the Old by the Septuagint³ that I

¹ **quicken him** – stir him up.

² **explication** – detailed explanation.

³ **Septuagint** – translation of the Old Testament Scriptures into Greek, begun in the third century B.C.

can find. Divers⁴ learned interpreters do here render it by *corrigas*: “that you should correct”; and Erasmus⁵ in his notes frames a word more expressive of its emphasis, *supercorrigas*, which imports “to correct with accuracy and exactness”—as one that goes over a work again that he may be sure to leave no blemish upon it or defect in it. Some understand this part of Titus’ charge to respect the correction of the manners of the Cretans by reproof and sound doctrine, and with this sense the Arabic version fully concurs, *Ut res vitiosas corrigas*: “That you should correct the things that are faulty”; and it is evident in the sequel⁶ of the epistle that this was one part of his work. But I conceive this is not so immediately intended by this term, but rather, the settlement and disposing of things relating to the offices and government in the house of God, and the order of their communion in the church who were members of it in a full and exact agreement with the rule of Christ’s appointment, which the apostle had not time to bring to perfection during his stay with them. And this sense very well agrees with the use of a term of near affinity with this one in our text (namely, διορθώσεως) in Hebrews 9:10, where the days of the gospel are called “the time of reformation,” because in them the state of the church is brought to its utmost perfection here on earth—and all that was wanting⁷ in the Law is fully supplied in the New Testament.

B. Specific: Appointing elders in every city

[Now we will look at] a more particular account of the one special charge left up-on Titus: that he should appoint elders in every city, as Paul had commanded him (Ti 1:5).

The edification and beauty of the church is much concerned in her order, not such an order as superstition will dictate, or litigious nicety⁸ contends for, but such as we have already described, which sets her in a conformity with Christ’s will; and particularly the filling up of the offices that He has appointed with persons duly qualified for the administration of them, and the regular acting both of officers and members in their respective positions.

The particular charge given to Titus is to appoint elders in every city. This is to be explained by comparing it with Acts 14:23, where the practice of the apostles themselves is recorded: “When they had ordained [appointed]...elders in every church” (κατὰ πόλιν and κατ’ ἐκκλησίαν⁹ are the same in these texts). The converts in every

⁴ **divers** – various.

⁵ **Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam** (1466?-1536) – Dutch Renaissance humanist, Roman Catholic biblical scholar, and powerful advocate of church reform. He prepared his own edition of the New Testament in 1516, containing a Greek NT, a Latin translation, and annotations.

⁶ **sequel** – remainder.

⁷ **wanting** – lacking.

⁸ **litigious nicety** – quarrelsome preciseness over very small, unimportant details.

⁹ **κατὰ πόλιν and κατ’ ἐκκλησίαν** – “every city” and “every church.”

city were not then so numerous but they might conveniently come together in one place for the worship of God; and so to ordain them elders in “every city” was to do it in “every church.” And though these first ordinations were by extraordinary¹⁰ men, yet the people were not excluded from the just right of choosing their own ministers, for they were appointed to their charge with the concurrent vote and suffrage of the people.¹¹ Howbeit Titus was to preside in the management of this affair for their guidance and direction, both with respect to the office itself and their choice of persons duly qualified for it.

C. The character of those who are to “set in order”

In the next place (for the more full opening of the text), it will be necessary briefly to touch upon the quality and character of those persons that we here find concerned in the setting of things in order in the churches.

1. Paul bears the character of an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The person that employed Titus in this service, namely Paul, bears the character and had the office and authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ. The apostles had an immediate and extraordinary call to their office by God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence our apostle, when he would represent to the Galatians the dignity of his office that he might recover them to stability in the doctrine that he had preached to them, tells them that he was an apostle, “not of [from] men, neither by [through] man, but by [through] Jesus Christ, and God the Father” (Gal 1:1). Ordinary ministers as pastors or elders, though they are not of men, that is, receive not their authority from men, nor are of human right and appointment, yet are they by men, so as to be brought to their office by the call of the church. But it was not so with the apostles of Christ: they were neither of men nor by men, but had their call and power immediately from Christ—their ministry being antecedent¹² to the church,¹³ as that by which it was to be planted.

¹⁰ **extraordinary** – Coxe distinguishes between “ordinary” and “extraordinary” gifting and offices in the church. The “ordinary” are those that were appointed by Christ and His apostles for continued exercise in the church, such as elders and deacons. The “extraordinary” are those that were appointed by Christ for the temporary purpose of establishing the churches in their infancy, such as apostles and prophets.

¹¹ The way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person, fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit, unto the office of bishop or elder in a church, is, that he be chosen thereunto by the common suffrage [*vote*] of the church itself; and solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with imposition of hands of the eldership of the church, if there be any before constituted therein; and of a deacon that he be chosen by the like suffrage, and set apart by prayer, and the like imposition of hands (Act 14:23; 1Ti 4:14; Act 6:3, 5-6). (1689 London Baptist Confession 26.9)

¹² **antecedent** – something that goes before in time or order.

¹³ **their ministry...antecedent to the Church** – Christ appointed the apostles *before* the New Testament congregations existed; the apostles then planted and watered the churches (1Co 3:5-11).

And as they had an extraordinary call, so were they also qualified with extraordinary gifts and abilities for the work they were called to, and had the infallible guidance of the Spirit in their doctrine—which was but necessary, seeing the churches were to be founded and built thereupon (Eph 2:20). The apostles and prophets of the New Testament are the foundation, in respect of their doctrine; though Jesus Christ, Whom they preached, is the only foundation of the church in respect of trust and confidence. The power of the apostles extended to all the churches and was equal in them all when they were planted, and therefore Paul said, “that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches” (2Co 11:28), and as a fruit of this care in the discharge of his office he gives forth this commission to Titus. Herein we must consider him as acting by virtue of that authority which himself had received from Christ, Who is the first Subject and Head of all ecclesiastical power and jurisdiction. There is no such thing as authority in or over the church but what is derived from Christ, Who has all power in heaven and earth committed to Him (Mat 28:18).

2. Titus had the character and office of an evangelist.

The person employed, namely Titus, had the character and office of an evangelist. The evangelists were also extraordinary ministers (though inferior to the apostles) and did usually attend the motion and direction of the apostles, as assistants to them in preaching the gospel and setting the churches in due order when first planted. And though Titus is not expressly called an evangelist, yet if we consider his employment, and compare this epistle to him with those written to Timothy, who is particularly charged to “do the work of an evangelist” (2Ti 4:5), we shall have no reason to doubt their being both in the same capacity. And they acted not as diocesan bishops¹⁴ in their particular charge, but were sometimes employed in one part of the world, and sometimes in another, as the service of the gospel required their attendance. And since the ceasing of these extraordinary officers and the completing of the canon of the New Testament, all church offices and affairs are to be regulated and guided by the ordinary and standing rule of the Scriptures. And every particular congregation has not only the right, but is in duty bound, to dispose herself in that order, and under that rule and government, which Christ has appointed in His testament.

We shall now proceed to those things of which our text and the present occasion calls for some further discourse.

¹⁴ **diocesan bishops** – in a later period, elders who were given the responsibility of caring for multiple churches in a particular area (diocese).

II. Appointment of Deacons

A. The appointment of deacons in the church of Jerusalem

The first instance that we have of settling order in a Christian church by the ordaining of ordinary officers therein, is that of the appointment of deacons in the church of Jerusalem in Acts 6.

And this also I take to be included in the general commission here given to Titus that he should “set in order the things that are wanting [lacking],” for it appears that the primitive churches had both bishops, or elders, and deacons ordained in them, when brought to that settlement and order in which they were to continue (Phi 1:1). And the necessity of such an office and officers in the church, when the number of her members is increased, will quickly appear, as it did in the church at Jerusalem, for “when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians¹⁵ against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration” (Act 6:1). The Hellenists here mentioned were not Gentiles or Greeks by nation, but such of the scattered Jews who, having their education among the Greeks and speaking their language, were called Hellenists, in distinction from those born and bred up in Judea that spoke the common Jewish language, which was then a kind of Chaldeo-Syriac and is called the Hebrew tongue (Act 22:2) because of its then common use among the Hebrews or seed of Abraham in Judea. With respect to this, Paul affirms of himself that he was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phi 3:5).

Now upon this murmuring of the Hellenists, for the prevention of all disorder or neglect of this kind for the future, the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and told them that it was unreasonable for them to be taken off from the more weighty employment of preaching the gospel to give their attendance upon an affair of this nature. Therefore, that they might be at liberty to give themselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word, and yet the necessities of the poor and orderly dispensing of the church’s alms be provided for also, they commanded them to look out from among themselves seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom they might appoint over this business; which was accordingly done. This is in short the history of the first ordination of deacons. Because in this case what was first in this kind was to be the rule and standard of what should

¹⁵ **Grecians** – translated from the Greek Ἑλληνιστῶν (*Hellēnistōn*) from which we get the English “Hellenists.” “This term likely refers to Jews whose primary language was Greek, as distinct from those using a Semitic tongue [*the family of languages that include Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic, and others*]...Gutbrod (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 3:389) speaks of the difference as between those who are native to Israel and those who come from outside, but it is social and religious practice that seems to be central in the distinction. The linguistic [*language*] and social differences produced cultural differences that created a division in the church that the community now recognizes and works swiftly to quell [*put an end to*].” (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, 258)

afterwards be done, we shall take a review of some passages for our present instruction.

First, a deacon being an ordinary officer in the church, appointed to minister therein for the relief of the poor, the election of these officers of right belongs to that congregation where they are to serve in this capacity. The holy apostles, though vested with an extraordinary power and peculiarly entrusted by Christ with the appointment of such an office and officers, after they had informed the church thereabout and given them a rule to proceed by, left them to their own voluntary and free choice.

Secondly, the number here appointed, namely seven, was suited to the present necessity or convenience of that numerous congregation in which they were to minister, and is not intended as a rule that neither more nor fewer may be appointed in any congregation after. That is to be determined by a due comparing of the end of the office with the circumstances of each particular congregation, who are to govern their choice in point of number as may best answer the end, in a sufficient provision for their present necessity and comfort of their poor.

Thirdly, the rule of the church's proceeding in her election is laid before her, in an account of those qualifications which are requisite in persons to be employed in such a trust. They must be men "of honest report," men whose innocent and holy life is well-attested, persons of known and approved integrity, "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (Act 6:3). These general terms are comprehensive of the particulars mentioned by our apostle in that rule which he has given about the same matter in 1 Timothy 3:8-9, "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued,¹⁶ not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience."

It is an examination and trial of the persons to be chosen by this rule that the apostle intends in the next words, "And let these also first be proved [tested]; then let them use the office of [serve as] a deacon, being found blameless" (1Ti 3:10). This I mention [in order] that I may rectify a mistake which I think many have taken up from a misunderstanding of this text, wherein they suppose that the apostle requires that a trial should be made of elders and deacons in the discharge of the proper work of their office, before they are ordained to that office. But this way of trial is as foreign from the text, as the notion asserted is inconsistent with itself; for observe, he does not say: "Try whether they use the office of a deacon well"—which how can they do before they have it?—"and then let them be ordained, if for some time they have acquitted themselves¹⁷ well in it." But the trial he requires is antecedent¹⁸ to their

¹⁶ **doubletongued** – saying one thing with one person, another thing with another person (with intent to deceive).

¹⁷ **acquitted themselves** – discharged their duty.

¹⁸ **antecedent** – going before in time; prior.

using the office of a deacon, and is no other than a diligent comparing of the qualifications of the persons with the characteristics of one meet¹⁹ for such an office that he had before set down.

This I take to be the plain sense of the words. And if this be not admitted, we must suppose the rule of one apostle to contradict the practice of others acting by the same infallible guidance as he wrote—which is absurd, for it is plain in Acts that they were directed to examine and look into the qualifications and fitness of the persons to be chosen for deacons *before* they made choice of them, and that the apostles did by a solemn ordination vest them with their office before they acted in it, or used the office of a deacon.

Fourthly, as to the work of a deacon, the care of the poor is their special charge. And in order hereunto, the contributions and alms of the church are to be deposited with them, and entrusted to their distribution, as particular cases may require.

I shall now draw to a close this point, and pass on to what remains, when I have spoken a word or two.

B. To those who are ordained to the office of deacon

To the deacons, there are four things that I shall recommend to you as necessary in the discharge of that trust which is committed to you, namely, faithfulness, compassion, prudence, and diligence.

1. Faithfulness

You have a trust committed to you, namely, the alms and contributions of the church, which are indeed a kind of hallowed or dedicated things, and this is a considerable trust. Yea, the poor members of Christ, which are dear to Him as the apple of His eye, are committed to your care so far as concerns their relief and succor²⁰ in outward things, and this is a greater trust. You are in these things stewards for the church, yea, stewards for Christ; and it is required of a steward that he be found faithful (1Co 4:2). Consider therefore the duty of your position, and make conscience of a faithful discharge thereof, as knowing you must give an account to Christ (2Co 5:10)—Who has appointed you to this service, and with Him there is no respect of persons (Rom 2:11).

2. Compassion

Your business and employment is to relieve the necessities of the poor saints; and this you can never do with a right spirit unless you have a fellow-feeling with them in their necessities, and do by a gracious sympathy, as it were, put yourselves in their stead. He that gives must do it with cheerfulness, and that he will never do if compassion has not first filled his heart. Remember that this office in the church is a

¹⁹ **meet** – suitable; fit; qualified.

²⁰ **succor** – help.

fruit of Christ's pity and compassion for the poor. It is your duty to make your distributions in that manner as may best represent the pity and tenderness of Him Whom you serve in this work.

3. Prudence

Your pity must be guided by discretion. And as it is required that a deacon should have a plentiful anointing of the good and benign²¹ Spirit, that he may be kind and affectionately tender towards his brethren, so it is no less necessary that he be full of wisdom also, that he may rightly discern the case and circumstances of those that are to be relieved by him. And that he may carry an equal balance in his ministration, between the encouraging of idleness on the one hand, and neglect of the real distresses of any on the other—both these are extremes to be avoided. It is certain that there is so great a difference in the temper of persons, that there will be need of diligent enquiry after the necessities of some, whose modesty would hide them more than is meet, while the unreasonable importunity of others needs a prudent check.

4. Diligence

It is a service for Christ that you are employed in, and the work of the Lord must not be done negligently. Your heart must be in your work, and you must not do it as by the by,²² with a slight and indifferent spirit. But you must do as Hezekiah did the work of God in his place, whose encomium²³ was, “in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart” (2Ch 31:21). And know that your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord (1Co 15:58), for there is no service (except that which immediately respects the saving of men's souls) more acceptable to Christ than that which you are engaged in.

C. To the congregation that has called them to this office

To the congregation, it is your duty to give respect to your deacons, as esteeming their service in the church useful and honorable: “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree,²⁴ and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1Ti 3:13). But especially your duty is to encourage them in their work by a free and plentiful contribution to the poor, that out of the abundance of those that enjoy plenty, they may always have a sufficiency to provide for the relief of those that suffer want. Many things might be urged for the opening of your hearts to so good a work, but my present time will not admit of enlargement on this head.²⁵

²¹ **benign** – kind.

²² **by the by** – a matter of secondary importance; casually.

²³ **encomium** – warm, glowing praise.

²⁴ **degree** – grade of dignity and wholesome influence in the church.

²⁵ **head** – topic.

III. Appointment of Elders

I shall now proceed to the next thing that lies before us, namely, the appointing of elders in every city or church, which was particularly given in charge unto Titus.

A. The continuance of elders

Bishops or elders are ordinary officers in the church, of divine right and appointment, and are to be continued therein to the end of the world. Their office is superior to that of deacons, as more nearly concerning the good and edification of the church, by so much as the care and conduct of men's souls does transcend the care of the outward man and supplies of temporal life. The care that the apostles took for this provision in the church, we have seen something of in the opening of the words, as also the method they observed in the calling and ordaining of persons to this work; it was done, as Clement said, *συνευδοκησασης εκκλησιας πασης*, the whole church giving their consent and approbation.²⁶ And by their appointment it was that when the officers ordained by them were dead, other approved men should succeed in their room, unto whom the administration of holy things in the House of God was committed, and by whom the instruction and government of the church should be duly provided for. We have both the continuance of these officers and the reason of it asserted: "And 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: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-13). These last words are manifestly extended to the completing of the entire mystical Body of Christ, and so to the period of the dispensation²⁷ of grace in this world, till there shall no longer be a church on earth. And although some of those offices and gifts mentioned in verse 11 be now ceased, yet it is evident that others of them must continue to the end, until that whereunto a gospel ministry is designed be perfectly accomplished.

²⁶ When...we turn to the records of history we find evidence sufficient to show that the churches continued even after the rise of Episcopacy to defend and to exercise the right of election, that great principle which is the basis of religious liberty. The earliest and most authentic authority on this subject after that of the Scriptures themselves is derived from Clement of Rome contemporary with some of the apostles. This venerable father in his epistle to the church at Corinth about AD 96, or, according to Bishop Wake, between the 60th and 70th year of Christ, speaks of the regulations which were established by the apostles for the appointment of others to succeed them after their decease. This appointment was to be made with the consent and approbation of the whole church...grounded on their previous knowledge of the qualifications of the candidate for this office. This testimony clearly indicates the active co-operation of the church in the appointment of their ministers. (Lyman Coleman, *A Church without a Prelate: The Apostolical and Primitive Church*, 12)

²⁷ **dispensation** – administration.

It very well agrees with the scope of the apostle's discourse in this place to make a joint mention of extraordinary and ordinary ministers, since they are all given by Christ for one and the same end, namely, the perfecting of His mystical Body, which affords a good argument for the union of Christians in their different measures of attainment that the apostle is here pressing them to. The apostles, prophets, and evangelists were of necessity to be employed in the laying of the foundation of gospel churches, and the continuance of pastors and teachers is no less necessary for the continuance and carrying on of the spiritual building of the church to the end of the world. And there is no reason of concluding that all these officers must always be in the church [just] because they are here mentioned together, no more than there is to affirm that the power of working miracles should never cease, because the promise of such a power to some believers is indefinitely given out with the promise of salvation by faith in Christ—which branch of the promise is certainly extended to all believers in all ages (Mar 16:16-18).

Now as it is *de facto*²⁸ evident that miracles were for the confirmation of the gospel in the first promulgation²⁹ of it, and are now ceased; so it is as plain that the office and gifts of apostles, prophets, and evangelists were for the first planting of the churches, and no longer to continue than until their order was fully settled and the revelation of the mind of God in the New Testament perfected. And then the wisdom of Christ saw it best to leave the churches to the rule of His written Word, and the guidance of their ordinary officers according thereto.

B. Bishops, overseers, elders, pastors, and teachers

The officers that we are now treating of, which are in our text called elders (πρεσβυτέρου), are in the very next words styled bishops or overseers (ἐπίσκοποι, the like application of both these terms to the same persons and office you may observe in Acts 20), and in Ephesians 4:11 are called pastors and teachers. It is evident the Holy Spirit intends by any of these different terms no distinction or preeminence of office among those that bear these characters, but they are all suited to the same office in its different respects. These ministers are sometimes called elders, because of their gravity and precedence in the house of God, perhaps with some respect to the paternal authority and preeminence of the heads of families and elders of the people amongst the Israelites of old; and at other times bishops or overseers, because their work is to take the oversight of the flock, and to acquit themselves as faithful watchmen who watch for the souls of the people committed to their trust, that they may give an account of them to the great Shepherd with joy, and not with grief. And because it is incumbent on them to feed the church with the words of eternal life, and

²⁸ *de facto* – in fact.

²⁹ **promulgation** – open declaration.

to open the mind of God to them from the Scriptures that they may by their ministry be instructed unto His kingdom, they are also styled pastors and teachers.

Our way being thus far prepared by this general account of the office of eldership, and the necessary continuance of it in the church, many things do readily offer themselves as proper to be discoursed of under this head, but (omitting others) I must at present confine myself to a brief enquiry after these two that follow.

C. The qualifications requisite in the person that performs this office

First, as to the necessary qualifications of an elder or bishop, they are particularly and fully described to us in Titus 1:6-9 compared with 1 Timothy 3:2-7. The first thing required in both places is that he be *blameless*, not absolutely without sin, for there are none such in the world, but free from any notable blemish or scandalous offence in his life—a man whose general conduct and demeanor is to the adorning of that doctrine which he possesses himself, and must teach to others.

And then, *the husband of one wife*; it is not required that he be a married man, but supposing him to be so, it is necessary that he have been the husband but of one wife, namely, at one time. For though he had repented of his polygamy, yet the note of his former incontinency would stick upon him—for polygamy had no good hearing even amongst the civilized heathens. And it was meet that a bishop *must have a good testimony among those who are outside*, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil (1Ti 3:7). And this does also include such as had put away their wives and married others, which was a thing that both the Jews and Gentiles used to do, and was utterly forbidden by Christ except in the case of fornication (Mat 19:9; 1Co 7:10-16).

In like manner, his children (if he have any) and their course of life under his family discipline must be considered. They must be *faithful*, not living still in idolatry and paganism, but of a sober well-governed life, being in subjection to him with all gravity—for if it do not appear that he rules his own house well, how shall he be esteemed fit to take care of the church of God?

He must also be *temperate*,³⁰ careful, and diligent in his work and duty in the station wherein he has been, otherwise he will be very unmeet³¹ for a pastoral charge, which requires perpetual watching. [He must be] *sober-minded*, of a temperate life, adorned with modesty and moderation; and *of a good behavior*, full of gravity and humanity in all his demeanor. [He must not be] *self-willed*, proud and heady; *not violent, nor soon angry*, but a man that has good government of his passions, and whose meekness disposes him to instruct and exhort men *with all longsuffering and teaching* (2Ti 4:2).

³⁰ **temperate** – having one's emotions, impulses, or desires under control; self-controlled.

³¹ **unmeet** – not fit; not proper.

He must *not be given to much wine*, but set in himself an example of mortification to sensual delights. [He must] utterly detest all unjust and sordid ways of heaping up, or keeping riches for himself, as *not greedy for money*, nor liable to just suspicion that he undertakes his charge from a base covetousness of any outward compensations belonging thereto, but of a ready mind and sincere love to Christ, and to the souls of men. And he must be *hospitable*, that so he may go before others in all acts of kindness and charity towards the saints; *not a quarrelsome*, litigious, or contentious man, but furnished both with abilities and a ready mind to teach and instruct others; and therefore he must be well furnished with the knowledge of the mysteries of God Himself, and one *holding fast the faithful Word* as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. In a word, he must be a man holy and just himself, and a lover of all that are so; yea, one whose virtues time has proved and made conspicuous, a steady and well-settled man; *not a novice*,³² lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

This is the rule of trial that all churches are bound to have in their eye and diligently to attend to in their election of elders. When they do so, Christ approves their choice, and the Holy Spirit makes them overseers; for the gifts, grace, and authority of a gospel minister are from Him; and no man or society of men under heaven can, *de jure*,³³ make him a minister that Christ has not qualified for such a service. The validity of all the church's acts depends upon, and is determined by, their conformity to the rule of Christ's holy will and testament.

And as these gifts, grace, and virtues ought to be in some good degree visible in him that is ordained to eldership, before that charge be committed to him, so after his ordination it behooves him perpetually to endeavor the giving of a more abundant proof of them in him, by a daily increase in their exercise.

D. The duties of an elder

But to proceed, secondly, the relative duties of an elder and the people are to be considered. The due handling of this would require a treatise³⁴ by itself, but it cannot be expected that I should enlarge upon particulars, nor indeed so much as touch upon many things that do properly belong to it. All that I can do is briefly to speak about some things of a general and comprehensive nature, with some enforcement of what may be especially seasonable at this time.

First, we shall speak to the duty of an elder in his position, which is either more public or more private; for in both these respects he is under a bond of duty to Christ, and to the souls of the members of that church which he ministers in.

³² **novice** – new convert.

³³ **de jure** – by law; conforming to law.

³⁴ **treatise** – detailed written treatment.

1. Public duties

We shall begin with those duties that are more publicly to be discharged by him. And they are,

a. The pastor stands as a middle-person between God and the people.

The pastor stands in some respects, and acts in some things, as a middle-person between God and the people. Mistake me not, he is not to be a mediator between God and the church, or in his own interest to interpose himself between God and the people—for such an office and service for the church no man on earth, nor saint or angel in heaven is capable of; its glory is Christ's alone. As there is but one God, so in this regard there is but “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1Ti 2:5). But in two respects, a minister stands between God and the people:

1) Public prayers

He is to be the mouth of the people unto God, and to go before them in the exercise of those gifts and graces that Christ has furnished him with, in conceiving and pouring out the public prayers of the church to the Most High. And by some this is taken to be the special import of that saying of the apostles in Acts 6:4, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” They seem equally to respect in both (namely, prayer and the ministry of the Word) the public discharge of their office in the church; and there is no doubt but what is here mentioned continues to be the duty of ordinary ministers in their station, as much as it was the apostles'. And the Scripture knows no other provision for the orderly and profitable performance of this service in the church, than what Christ has made by enduing persons with those gifts, and such an anointing of His Holy Spirit, as may enable them to go before their brethren therein. It would be very sad to have the souls of men committed to the care of such as are so unacquainted with, or insensible of, their spiritual concerns, as not to be in some good degree prepared for this part of their work: to be the mouth of the people in pouring out their solemn public prayers unto God.

2) Preaching

As he is to be the mouth of God to the people, to deliver the message from God and speak to them in His Name, it is eminently the work and business of a pastor to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2Ti 4:2). They are ministers of the New Testament and God's ambassadors unto men, who are to dispense the mysteries of God to His church, and they ought to exercise all diligence herein—being diligent to approve themselves workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth (2Ti 2:15). And woe will be to him that undertakes this charge and preaches not the gospel, which is the sincere milk and spiritual food with which the souls of his flock continually ought to be fed. This duty is so earnestly pressed upon all occasions where these things are treated of in the Scriptures that there is no need of any

other arguments to enforce it but what are obvious to everyone's eye in the reading of them. He deserves not the name of a minister, pastor, or bishop that labors not herein.

It will not (I suppose) be expected that I should here lay down rules for preaching, or enter into a discourse about the method of theological studies in order thereunto. Only give me leave at present to recommend three things to those that are under so strict and solemn a charge to preach the gospel.

a) Let your care be to deal with the souls and consciences of men, as knowing that it is the salvation of souls that you are to labor after, a care of souls that is committed to you, and an account of them that you must make to God. It is not your business to gratify the itching ears or wanton fancies³⁵ of men, but to speak to their hearts, and “by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God” (2Co 4:2). Lay out your pains³⁶ in a solid explaining of the principles of religion, and a judicious recommendation of them to practice, that sincere piety and the power of godliness may be promoted by your ministry. Press the particular duties of men in every relation and capacity upon them: warn them of the sleights of Satan, rebuke the errors and disorders of them that go astray, comfort the afflicted and broken in heart—and in these things, let no zeal, diligence, boldness, industry, or labor be wanting.

b) That this may be accomplished, be sure that you speak “as the oracles of God” (1Pe 4:11), and deliver that doctrine to the people which is drawn from the pure fountain of God's Word. It is no less than the evidence of divine authority that will work upon the soul, and command the conscience of a man, whether it is by way of comfort, exhortation, or reproof—it is the stamp of heaven upon the things delivered by you that renders them powerful. Let it therefore be your principal care in preaching clearly to open and pertinently to apply the Scriptures, that your hearers may bear away this conviction from your sermons: that you “have the mind of Christ” (1Co 2:16). It is not enough that the things you speak be true, but you must manifest them to be so by strong and convincing proof. Make conscience of giving, what in you lies, the very sense of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures that you speak about; and weaken not excellent truths by wringing them out of such texts as intend another thing. The Word of God is sacred and must be handled with all religious respect and reverence. Divine things will admit of no trifling.

c) Remember that the duty of your position is not to preach yourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord (2Co 4:5). His glory must be the mark aimed at by all your labors, and His grace the principal subject of all your discourses. It is not a philosophic harangue³⁷ that will save the souls of men, but the preaching of Christ crucified. His

³⁵ **wanton fancies** – immoral desires.

³⁶ **lay out your pains** – expend your diligent effort.

³⁷ **harangue** – long, loud, or impassioned speech.

gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16); and His Holy Name is the ointment that perfumes all religious exercises. Therefore, I will not only say, let there be *Aliquid Christi*,³⁸ something of Christ in every sermon, but let Christ be the beginning, middle, and end of your discourses—for in Him are hid “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3); in Him is the fountain and head-spring of all true comfort and holiness.

b. It is his duty to administer the ordinances.

Unto the public work and charge of a bishop or elder belongs also the administration of the sacraments, or ordinances of positive institution in the church, as baptism and the Lord’s Supper. This appertains to that dispensation of the mysteries of God that is committed to him, and to that feeding of the sheep of Christ which is required of him.

c. It is his duty to exercise discipline in the church.

It is his duty to take care of the due exercise of discipline in the church, and the right ordering of all things pertaining to the government thereof. He is the overseer of God’s house and is to rule therein, not in a despotic or lordly way (1Pe 5:3), but by the testament of Christ—as becomes a minister, and as one set over the Lord’s heritage who is a voluntary people, to be governed not with force and rigor but with their own consent. All the brethren have an interest in the management of church affairs, in the admission and ejection of members; yet this denies not a peculiar concernment of the elder in these things, and a neglect of their due administration will especially be charged upon him if guilty thereof. And in these things, great prudence, tenderness, diligence, and impartiality is required of him. It is a matter of great importance that the gates of the Lord’s house, the goings out and comings in thereof, be well looked to. If members be not received with due caution, our number may be increased, but not our joy; and if any be precipitately³⁹ and without just grounds ejected, the scandal and inconvenience will be as great.

And in all these things, an elder must endeavor so to demean⁴⁰ himself that, in the whole course of his ministry, there may be kept up a very lively representation of the love, care, wisdom, compassion, faithfulness, and patience of the Lord Jesus Christ Whom he serves.

2. Private duties

I shall say no more of those duties that are incumbent on a pastor in the public exercise of his ministry, but in the next place there are also duties of great importance to the souls of men that an elder is bound diligently to attend the discharge of in a more *private* and particular way. He is obliged to a constant watchfulness for

³⁸ *Aliquid Christi* – Latin = something of Christ.

³⁹ **precipitately** – hastily; quickly.

⁴⁰ **demean** – behave.

and over his people, and ought diligently to enquire and search into the state of his flock—that those who are in danger to err for want of counsel may be directed; the unruly warned and rebuked; the feeble and dejected soul strengthened, comforted, and encouraged; and those that are beset with difficulties and temptations succored and relieved. Unto an unwearied diligence in these things Paul excites the elders of the church at Ephesus by his own example: “You know,” says he, “how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house” (see Act 20:20). The like he does to those of Thessalonica, “Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory” (1Th 2:10-12). And again, “Whom [Christ] we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom [that is, by a suitable applying of things to them according to their various circumstances and conditions]; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour” (Col 1:28-29). And all these pains must be enlivened by a holy example; for if a minister does not live over the instruction he gives to others and appear a burning and shining light in life and conversation as well as in doctrine, his ill manners will do more hurt than all his words can ever do good. Examples have the greatest influence upon men. *Verba docent, exempla trahunt.*⁴¹ Therefore is that charge so frequently repeated that they should in all things be examples to the flock (1Pe 5:3).

I will add but a word or two for the encouragement and quickening of a pastor to his duty, and then pass on to what remains.

IV. A Pastor’s Duty toward His People

What I intend at present, I shall sum up under two heads: consider by Whose authority you are to act in your place, and [consider] Whom you serve.

A. A minister of Christ to the people

You are a minister of Christ, not a creature of human appointment. It is by the Holy Spirit that you are made an overseer, therefore take heed to yourself and to the flock of God (Act 20:28). A like argument or motive is included in Colossians 4:17, “And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.” To receive a ministry in the Lord is to be employed in a service for Christ, and by His order and authority. Now from hence these things (and others like to them) may be inferred:

⁴¹ *Verba docent, exempla trahunt.* – *Latin* = Words instruct, illustrations lead.

A. That there is a real dignity and worth in the office which you are to administer. “If a man desire the office of a bishop [says our apostle], he desireth a good work” (1Ti 3:1). It is an office that a man must labor in, but his labor is in “a good work,” namely, that which is honorable as well as useful, as the word *καλός* signifies; and you know *difficilia que pulchra* (honorable employments are not without their burden). Men may despise this function, but let not that discourage you. Christ has honored you, and let the sense of duty and gratitude to Him bear you above all discouragements to a faithful discharge of your trust—and that with holy boldness and fortitude of mind.

B. If you have received your office from Christ, you must be responsible to Him for the discharge of it; stewards must one day give an account to their Lord, and thrice happy is he to whom Christ shall say in the day of account, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Mat 25:21). There is nothing that tends more to engage us to all diligence and faithfulness in our calling, than a deep and fixed thoughtfulness of that solemn audit which we must be brought to, at the kingdom and appearing of the great Shepherd.

C. Those that Christ employs in His work may expect His gracious presence and assistance in all the difficulties that do attend it. For this we have His word: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Mat 28:20). In other words, Though you may be persecuted, you shall never be forsaken of Me; and though your burden may sometimes press you with a great weight, yet My strength shall be made perfect in your weakness, and My grace shall always be sufficient for you (2Co 12:9). It is the grace and assistance of Christ that a minister must depend upon, and expect the success of his labors from. And having ground for such an expectation, let him not faint from the apprehension of any hardship or opposition that may lie in his way—for all power in heaven and earth is in His hand by Whom he is employed.

D. Seeing he is engaged in Christ’s service, the reward of faithfulness therein is sure; Christ will not fail to show Himself a bountiful Lord and Master to those that serve Him. None ever were, or shall be, losers by doing His work. This is the encouragement that Peter lays before the elders of the church, and exhorts them to lift up their heart to: “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1Pe 5:4). And this will be a sufficient compensation of all sorrow and travail here. Look how much your labor has been more than others—God will clothe you with the brighter rays of glory. Your converts shall then be your crown and your joy, when you that have turned many to righteousness shall shine as the stars for ever and ever (Dan 12:3).

B. The care and charge of souls

Consider that it is the care and charge of souls that is committed to you; not the temporal concerns of this life, but the affairs of eternal life are the business of your stewardship.

Now one soul is of more worth than the entire world, because [it is] immortal and made for an eternal state. The influence that the ministry of the Word has into the future state of men made Paul say, as in an ecstasy, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (2Co 2:16). They are the souls of men that God thought it worth the giving of His own Son to redeem, and Christ thought not [too] much to shed His precious blood for.⁴² The church is a society of men that God has purchased to Himself by His own blood, and now has committed to your care, and has appointed you to watch for their souls. Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to your flock—for if any of them perish in an evil way through your neglect of duty towards them, [then] they die in their sins, but God will require their blood at your hand (Eze 3:18-20; 33:6-8).

V. The People’s Duty toward Their Pastors

We come now to the last thing that lies before us, namely, the duty of the people towards their pastors.

Able and faithful pastors are a great blessing and special fruit of Christ’s love to His church, and He as well expects and requires her improvement of so great a talent, and the cheerful performance of her duty towards her ministers, as He does strictly charge them to acquit themselves with all fidelity and diligence in their positions. I am under a necessity of bringing this part of my discourse into a narrow compass; and therefore shall recommend to you on these four things.

A. The duties of the congregation

1. You owe to your pastor great love for his work’s sake.

You owe to your pastor great love, respect, and honor for his work’s sake; and God requires that you make a due payment thereof. This our apostle often presses with great earnestness, for instance, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know [that is to acknowledge with due respect] them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1Th 5:12-13). And again, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (1Ti 5:17). If you have a true friend in the world, it is he that watches for your souls, tells you the truth, and travails night and day to present you perfect unto God. Let not his faithfulness in admonishing you cause an abatement of your love to him; but if you love your own salvation, let it rather raise your esteem of him. No wise man will hate his physician for giving a bitter potion when his life is saved by it; or a surgeon for performing an operation painful to him, when the re-

⁴² The Scriptures inform us that the value God set on His people for their salvation was based on His eternal purpose to save them because of His love, not based on any inborn value He saw in them (Rom 5:6-8, Eph 2:8-10).

storing or preserving of a member of his body depends thereon. He that brings to you the good tidings of salvation, and publishes peace, deserves to have his feet esteemed beautiful, and to be received with the love and respect that is due to so good a message and the bringer of it. Christ will not bear the contempt of His messengers; therefore take heed that you provoke Him not by casting a scornful eye upon them, nor rob your own souls of the benefit of their ministry, by entertaining evil surmises or undue prejudices against them.

2. You owe submission to them in the discharge of their office.

You owe submission and obedience to them in the discharge of their office, and in the exercise of that rule and oversight which Christ has committed to them for your edification: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves” (Heb 13:17). It is not a blind obedience that the apostle requires, nor such as shall suppose a legislative power in church-officers, but an orderly subjection to them acting in their office according to the law and testament of Jesus Christ—even a ready obedience to the Word of God dispensed by them, and humble submission to their just reproofs and ministerial correction when rendered necessary by any misconduct; and this either in the public or more private discharge of their trust. God does not require that men should pull out their own eyes, and slave themselves to the conduct of church officers, without the exercise of their own reason and judgment—as it is in the Papacy,⁴³ where the blind lead the blind until both fall into the ditch (Luk 6:39). But when the law of Christ is observed, and conformity with it urged by the evidence and demonstration of truth from the Holy Scriptures, herein the obedience of the people is justly expected. He that thinks himself too good, or too wise, to receive instruction or submit to reproof from his pastor ill deserves a place in any Christian congregation. “My brethren, be not many masters [take heed of a proud factious spirit], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Jam 3:1).

And as it is your duty to receive the doctrine of Christ dispensed by them with meekness and fear, and with humility to submit to the discipline that they exercise according to the authority they have received from Christ, so also ought you to propose their holy example for your imitation; “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (Heb 13:7). Be followers of them as they are of Christ (1Co 11:1); for if it be their duty to be examples to their brethren, “in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1Ti 4:12), it must be no less the duty of their brethren to write after their copy and conform to their example in all these things. For if the discharge of this office be not improved by the church unto their edification and real growth in grace and holiness, the end of it, as to them, is utterly lost.

⁴³ **Papacy** – Roman Catholicism.

3. You must continue instant in prayer to God for them.

You are much concerned to continue instant⁴⁴ in prayer to God for them (Rom 12:12). You know the apostle Paul often recommends himself to the prayers of the church; and if he thought them so necessary for his help, we have much more reason to account them so for ours. The temptations of ministers are many; they have great difficulties and discouragements to conflict with; and their work is such as they can never fill up their callings as they ought, but by the special aid and assistance of the Holy Spirit. The success of all their labors depends upon a divine blessing and the presence of God with them; and in these things both the glory of Christ and the comfort and edification of your own souls is nearly⁴⁵ concerned—which is a sufficient reason for your making conscience of this duty.

4. You are bound to provide a comfortable maintenance for them.

You are bound, according to your ability, to provide a comfortable and honorable maintenance⁴⁶ for them. “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked” (Gal 6:6-7). These words call not only for maintenance of ministers, but for such a plentiful contribution as may make them partakers with you “in all good things.” If God blesses the congregation with a plentiful portion of this world’s goods, it is their duty to make their minister a party with them in their flourishing condition. Considering the place and employment he is in and the service he attends, it would be extremely unworthy to think you have done enough if [only] his pressing necessities are answered, while you abound in superfluities.⁴⁷ If the congregation be poor, their minister must be content to be poor with them, yea, rejoice to approve himself a minister of Christ by hunger and nakedness, if the providence of God call him thereto. But while it is in the power of your hand to provide better for him, God expects it from you; and “be not deceived, God is not mocked,” neither will He suffer His commands to be slighted and evaded, without rendering a just rebuke to the offender, “for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal 6:7).

a. Remember the pastor’s obligations.

Now, that you may the better understand how far you are concerned in this duty, before I proceed to the farther pressing of it, let me put you in remembrance of the pastor’s obligations.

1) That a minister is bound to attend wholly and only upon his calling in the ministry, and not to entangle himself in the affairs of this life, that he may please Him by Whom he is called to this spiritual warfare—and nothing but real necessity may dispense with the contrary (2Ti 2:1-7). His whole time and strength is little enough to

⁴⁴ **continue instant** – continue to do something with intense effort; persist in.

⁴⁵ **nearly** – closely.

⁴⁶ **maintenance** – support.

⁴⁷ **superfluities** – things that are in excess of what is necessary.

be employed in the work he is called to; he must give himself to the ministry of the word and prayer, and continue in reading, meditation, etc., as a man wholly devoted unto gospel service—and is therefore by his call in the ministry secluded from those ways and means of providing for his own subsistence, as the trades and secular employments of others furnish them with; that his mind, by the cares of worldly business, may not be diverted from that study of God’s Word and care of souls, which the duty of his station engages him to. And if he may not expose himself to the careful thoughts that accompany worldly business, though tending to his profit, certainly it is no way meet⁴⁸ that he should be left to conflict with the thorny cares of a necessitous⁴⁹ condition, while those he ministers to have means to prevent it.

2) It is no less the duty of a minister than of other men, to provide for his family, and (what lies in him) to take care of his wife and children, that they may not be left exposed to a thousand miseries and temptations when he is gone. I confess, of all men in the world, a covetous raking temper worst becomes a minister;⁵⁰ but we greatly mistake if we think he must divest himself of the due affection of a husband towards his wife, or of a father towards his children—or that those fruits thereof, which are justly esteemed commendable in others, should be a fault in him.

3) An elder or bishop is under a special charge to use hospitality, and to set in himself a pattern of charity and compassionate bounty to poor souls. And if it be his duty to be hospitable and charitable in an eminent degree, then without controversy the people are concerned to endeavor that he may be capable of giving proof of this grace in him by the exercise of it as there is occasion.

b. Reasons for the congregation’s obligation to this duty

These things being premised, I shall show you that you lie under the strongest obligation imaginable to this duty.

1) By the eternal law of nature

The law and light of nature obliges you to it, as to the matter of equity and justice. And from hence our apostle takes his first plea, “Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?” (1Co 9:7). The ministry is warfare, undertaken at the command of Christ, for the service of your souls; and it is as reasonable that the minister should receive a supply of outward things from you, as it is that a faithful soldier should receive his pay from his captain at the charge⁵¹ of the commonwealth, for whose good he militates. Shall a man feed a flock (as a pastor does), and be denied to drink of the milk of that flock which it is his work

⁴⁸ **meet** – suitable; fit.

⁴⁹ **necessitous** – needy.

⁵⁰ **a covetous raking temper worst becomes a minister** – a greedy disposition to rapidly accumulate wealth is most unfit for an elder.

⁵¹ **charge** – expense.

to keep and feed? Or is it consistent with common justice to deprive a man of the fruit of that vineyard which is planted and cultivated by his own labor? Such is the case in respect of maintenance between a minister and the people. It is not your charity that I ask for him, but justice and debt that I plead for. He is employed in your service, and of right should live upon your charge. Nay, you have called him off from other business, and therefore his maintenance is as due from you as is the wages of your servant—though I fear some give more to the meanest⁵² servant in their house, than they are willing to do to their minister. Certainly, if you choose as you ought, your ministers are not of the lowest of the people, but may be allowed to have a share of common prudence and ability for business with other men. They could manage traders or fall into other employments, and get estates as well as you, if they were not devoted to a better service—and must they needs be devoted to necessities and misery in the same hour that they enter upon the ministry? My brethren, this ought not to be! Let your ministers have as good treatment at least as the Law provided for the oxen: “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn” (Deu 25:4). Is it oxen God is concerned about? Or was there no higher end of this law than that the brute creature should not be abused? Certainly there was, “Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?” (1Co 9:10-11).

2) By the express command and appointment of Christ

The Lord has not left us to argue this only from general principles of reason and common equity, but, to put the matter beyond dispute, has superadded His express command. Thus He provided for His ministers in the time of the Law, which the apostle urges to the next place, “Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?” (1Co 9:13). God did no sooner separate the Levites to the service of His sanctuary, but He by law provided for their subsistence. And though they were but one tribe in twelve, yet the tenth of the increase of the whole land was given to them, besides the first-fruits and offerings and divers⁵³ other advantages; so that their lot might equal, yea, exceed that of their brethren. This law indeed is now abrogated,⁵⁴ and we pretend to no right of tithing your estates; but the moral equity of it can never cease. Neither has Christ left gospel ministers to the wide world, but has made provision for them also, so far as the interest of His command will go with them that profess His Name; for so it follows, “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1Co 9:14). The laborer is still worthy of

⁵² **meanest** – lowest in rank.

⁵³ **divers** – various.

⁵⁴ **abrogated** – done away with; that is, the requirements of the ceremonial laws for temple worship ceased when Christ became a better sacrifice once for all (Heb 9:11-28).

his hire, and not the less worthy because he labors in the gospel. Though indeed, if men did fully come up to their duty, yet still the charge of gospel worship will appear very inconsiderable when compared with that of the Law; for, were that my business, I think I could demonstrate that the fifth part of their estates was yearly to be spent in things relating to the Temple service. And if we are sensible of the great privilege and blessing of the gospel, on higher accounts than merely the case of those burdens, we shall never think much to defray the moderate charge of a gospel ministry, in such a manner as may give a reputation to our profession.⁵⁵

3) On the account of the great and manifest evil and inconvenience that follows the neglect thereof

That you may prevent the evil and inconvenience that follows the neglect of this duty, it concerns you cheerfully to practice it. I might have said “evils and inconveniences,” as of many, for many there are, and those of easy observation to an unprejudiced eye. But it is the discouragement of study that at present I chiefly aim at. That study must needs be discouraged (I intend the study of theology) by the people’s neglect to make a comfortable provision for their ministers is too evident to require a proof. Who will apply himself to gather and lay up those stores of solid learning that are needful to a minister, when he can expect to purchase nothing to himself but poverty and distress thereby? Or how shall a minister be capable to furnish himself with the universal knowledge of things relating to his work, if he has no means of providing for his own information, or no time free from cares and worldly business?

And the disadvantage of this will at last fall to the share of the people that he ministers to. He that considers that the Holy Scriptures are originally written in Hebrew and Greek must have a hard forehead if he deny the usefulness of learning to a minister. Besides, there are many other things that call for [learning] in reference to the opening of the Scriptures, which I cannot now insist upon. And it is not without diligent and continual study that the deep things of God can be searched out and so proposed to you, as to enrich your minds with the clear and solid knowledge of them.

I confess, a little learning, and less study, may furnish a man with such a discourse as may please some weak persons who judge of a sermon by the loudness of the voice and affectionate sentences, or who can fancy themselves to be fed with the ashes of jingling words and cadency⁵⁶ of terms in a discourse. But alas! The seeming warmth of affection that is stirred by such means is as a short-lived land-flood that has no spring to feed it. He that will do the souls of his people good and approve himself a pastor after God’s heart, must feed them with knowledge and understanding and endeavor to maintain a constant zeal and affection in them by well-informing their judgments and such an opening of the mind of God from the Scriptures as may

⁵⁵ **profession** – expression of faith in Jesus Christ.

⁵⁶ **cadency** – rise and fall of sounds; rhythm.

command their consciences. And this is not to be expected but from him that labors in his study as well as in his pulpit. Mistake me not! I know the success and fruit of all the studies and labors of him that preaches the gospel is from the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, but the assistance of the Spirit is to be expected by us in the way of our duty.

B. How the congregation can encourage the pastor

These things might be yet applied more home to my present purpose, but perhaps some will think there is too much said already (though I heartily wish more were not needful) and my time calls me to put a period to this exercise. Therefore I will only add a word for the enforcement of this and the other duties which I have laid before you, by accommodating the same things to you that were before touched, for the encouragement and quickening of your pastor in his duty.

1. *First*, remember that your pastor is the minister of Christ, one that dispenses the mysteries of God to you in His Name; and therefore, when your minister is acting in his place, according to his duty, the Lord Jesus will account that done to Himself that is done to His minister—for Jesus said, “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth [rejects] you despiseth [rejects] me” (Luk 10:16). If the Name and authority of Christ will beget awe in you, or His matchless and unspeakable love influences you, there is no want of motives to those duties that have been pressed upon you. If you acknowledge a religious respect and reverence due to the Son of God, exercise it in humble obedience to His Word. If you love Him, and value His gospel, treat not His ministers in an unworthy manner. Forget not that He Who gave His life a ransom for you, well deserves a return of the greatest love from you, and to be honored by you, not only with good words, but with your substance and the first fruits of all your increase.

2. *Secondly*, it is the business of your salvation, and the concern of your precious and immortal souls, that a minister is employed in; and therefore it is much more your own interest than his that you should make conscience of your duty. With this argument the apostle enforces his exhortation, “for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17). The ministry can never be effectual to the saving of your souls, if you be not sincere in obedience under it.⁵⁷ And will you be less careful for your souls, and their eternal welfare, than you are for your bodies and the comforts of a temporal life? Can you be content to lay out your strength and substance to provide for these, and neglect the other?

⁵⁷ Not that salvation is by works, but rather the reality our salvation, which is by grace alone, is shown by good works (Eph 2:8-10).

It is sad to consider how many there are among professors⁵⁸ that live in this world as if there were no truth in the report of that which is to come, and have the meanest esteem of the most necessary means of salvation, namely, the Word, the ordinances of Christ, and a gospel ministry. Many there are that besides a provision of necessaries can expend perhaps a hundred pounds⁵⁹ yearly, more or less, for the convenience, ornament, or delight of a frail carcass—who will grudge half so much for the poor or the support of gospel worship. If their bodies be afflicted, it is not five, ten, or twenty pounds that they think too much for a physician, in recompense of his skill and care about them; when it may be they can scarce afford half so much to him that continually studies and travails to promote the cure and salvation of their sick souls. But when men come to be thoroughly possessed that eternity is no fiction, and the gospel is the only means of escaping the wrath to come and inheriting eternal glory, they will take other measures about these things.

VI. Conclusion

We have seen something of those gracious provisions that Christ in His wisdom and faithfulness has made for His church, in the appointment of deacons for the refreshing of the bowels of the poor, and pastors for the guidance and nourishment of your souls unto eternal life. We have heard something also of the duty He expects both from the officers and members in His church to the end of the world. What now remains, but that we all in our positions make conscience of living His commands (for if we know these things, happy are we if we do them, Joh 13:17), and practically acknowledge His love and faithfulness with a constant admiration of His grace, and the return of hearty praises to Him for all these fruits of it? That you may do [these things], may “the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:20-21).



⁵⁸ **professors** – those who profess faith in Christ.

⁵⁹ **pound** – English monetary unit. One hundred pounds in the late 1600s is worth approximately £12,200.00 in today’s money using the retail price index. This is equivalent to \$19,500 US dollars.

Biography of Nehemiah Coxe

Nehemiah Coxe was the son of the early Particular Baptist⁶⁰ leader Benjamin Coxe. In 1669, he joined the Bedford church made famous by John Bunyan,⁶¹ and in 1673 was called to serve as pastor of the church's sub-congregation at Hitchin. In 1674, he was censured by the Bedford church for certain "miscarriages." It may be that Coxe's words and practices were related to the issue of open or closed membership,⁶² so hotly debated at the time. Benjamin Coxe clearly advocated a closed membership position in his published writings, while the Bedford church, and especially Bunyan, resisted such a notion with great vigor. Could Nehemiah have been advocating such views, which the Bedford people would view as having a tendency to make rents and divisions in the congregation? His appearance at the closed membership Petty France church so soon after this could help to explain the situation.

Coxe was a qualified physician, skilled in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and a discerning theologian. When the West Country evangelist Thomas Collier began to deviate from the Calvinistic orthodoxy of the London churches, the elders in London asked Coxe to reply in print to Collier's views. He did this in his 1677 work *Vindiciae Veritatis, or a Confutation of the Heresies and Gross Errors Asserted by Thomas Collier*. In a brief epistle at the beginning of the work, they address the issue of Coxe's "inferiority in years," stating that he did not write the book out of a sense of personal ability, but at their request, because "we did judge him meet and of ability for the work" and because his responsibilities at the time provided him with the opportunity to answer Collier's errors. They say of this work, "We hope, we may truly say, without particular respect to his person, he hath behaved himself with that modesty of spirit, joined with that fullness and clearness of answer and strength of argument, that we comfortably conceive (by God's blessing) it may prove a good and sovereign antidote against the poison." The book is a very powerful expression of Reformed doctrine. In 1681, during a period of persecution, Coxe published the original edition of the present booklet, originally entitled *A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of an Elder*

⁶⁰ **Particular Baptist** – Baptist believers holding the biblical view of Particular Atonement. That is, Christ died for the elect, those chosen for salvation, and that His death for them was effective to actually take away their sins (Mat 1:21; Joh 10:1-30; Heb 10:14).

⁶¹ **John Bunyan** – (1628-1688): tinker (repairer of pots), Baptist pastor, prisoner, and author of the classic *The Pilgrims Progress*.

⁶² **open or closed membership** – "Open" membership did not require baptism (immersion in water of a professing believer) for church membership. "Closed" membership barred from membership those sprinkled as infants and never immersed as professing believers.

and Deacons in a Baptized Congregation in London. Also in 1681, Coxe published *A Discourse of the Covenants that God made with Men before the Law*. Coxe's contemporary, C.M. du Veil, in his 1685 Commentary on Acts, called Coxe "that great divine,"⁶³ eminent for all manner of learning," and referred to the "excellent" book *A Discourse of the Covenants* as full of "most weighty and solid arguments."

It is clear that Nehemiah Coxe was held in high regard by his brethren, and he was well equipped to serve as an editor of the *London Confession of Faith*. He died in 1688, prior to the General Assembly of 1689, leaving behind one son.

Biography adapted from www.ccel.org

⁶³ **divine** – theologian.