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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed My lambs.” (John 21:15)

The appearance of Christ beside the Sea of Tiberias was of special importance to Peter. He had been met by the Lord on a previous occasion, but in a more personal and private way, when the Saviour’s hand of forgiveness and restoration was extended to him. This later interview which occurred in Galilee was more official in nature, and pertains to the apostleship. Peter is here reinvested in the Master’s service.

The Holy Spirit has inspired a small but significant detail in the account which is worthy of note: *“they saw a fire of coals”* (John 21:9). The same expression is used in the description of the High Priest’s palace where Peter once stood and warmed himself with the enemies of the Lord, and denied Him with oaths and curses (John 18:18). The same man now sits beside a different fire which Christ provided for the disciples against the morning cold. Doubtless the glowing coals stirred Peter’s memory as the Lord, in the presence of the others, asks a pertinent three-fold question. It is addressed to *“Simon, son of Jonas”*, and the choice of name is important. Earlier in the gospels it is recorded that *“Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon **Bar-jona**: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art **Peter**”* (Matthew 16:17-18). The son of Jonas was given a new name upon discipleship and his confession of Christ; but Peter having denied that confession, the Lord here denies him his apostolic name, and reverts to the old epithet of ‘Simon’. It was a most severe rebuke, and implied that Peter had failed in his ministry.

The interrogation continues: “*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?*” The word ‘these’ is rather ambiguous. Some suggest that Christ is referring to Peter’s old business as a fisherman, and as He spoke gestured to the boat, the fishing tackle and the large catch which had just been landed. In other words: ‘which comes first? Me, or your business?’ But this interpretation is lacking in substance; for Peter had never before shown any undue love for his earthly business or secular employment to merit such criticism, having literally left all to follow the Saviour (cf Mark 10:28). In order to rightly discern what lies behind this question, other Scriptures must be consulted, for there was a definite reason in the query being specifically directed to Peter.

Consider the scene which occurred on the betrayal night, upon Mount Olivet. There Jesus said to His disciples “*all ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad*” (Matthew 26:31). Peter immediately retorted “*Though all men be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended*”; “*I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death*” (Luke 22:33). ‘These other disciples may fail, their love might break down at the last, but not mine’. There can be no doubt that Peter thought he loved the Lord more than did the other disciples; such was his opinion. But much had transpired in the intervening days, and so the Lord reminds him of his former opinion, and turning to the other disciples present on the beach, says, ‘Simon, do you still think that you love Me more than these?’ ‘Are you still harbouring the thought that you are superior in devotion to your brethren?’

What a lesson was being taught at this appearance, of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God! Are not the servants of God ever to be marked by humility? “*He that is least among you all, the same shall be great*” said the Lord to His own (Luke 9:48). “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of*

mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). In 1 Corinthians 15:9 the apostle Paul said *“I am the least of the apostles”*, again *“I am less than the least of all saints”* (Ephesians 3:8). These are vital principles in God’s Kingdom, here set forth by Christ’s words.

To that searching question, Peter replied thus: *“Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee”*. He conveniently ignored the latter part of the enquiry, no longer desiring to be compared with his fellow disciples, and instead appeals to the perfect knowledge that Christ had concerning him. But the interview was not at an end. *“He saith to him again the **second time**, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee”* (John 21:16). This time the Lord omitted any painful reference to the rest of the company, and instead poses point-blank the question *“lovest thou Me?”* Peter could do no more than repeat his previous answer – not without some embarrassment, as the other disciples were present and listening.

*“He saith unto him the **third time**, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee”* (John 21:17). By now, he was deeply grieved. It not only appeared as though the Lord doubted the sincerity of his avowals, but the thrice-repeated question was a painful parallel of his denial. However, the Saviour was working to an end, for the distress and grief induced in Simon’s heart provoked a new confession: *“**Lord, Thou knowest all things**”*. This was a plain ascription of the omniscience of the Lord, and is much akin to his previous testimony in Matthew 16:16, *“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God ”*. It was a further declaration that the Lord was indeed God manifest in the flesh (cf 1 Timothy 3:16), the one who knew all things, the Divine, all-wise Redeemer.

There remains in this interview the triple charge which Christ gave to Peter upon his replies: to feed His lambs and His sheep. This is no idle repetition, but more vital truth concerning the Kingdom of God. In the original Greek, two different words are used in this passage, both translated ‘feed’. In verses 15 and 17 its meaning is ‘to pasture’, or ‘to fodder’; but in verse 16 the underlying definition is ‘to supervise’ or ‘to rule’. Here are set forth the two main responsibilities of the ministerial office, and duties of the teaching elder: **instruction** and **government**. “*To feed the flock of God*” (1 Peter 5:2), the elders are to “*rule well*” in the House of God (cf 1 Timothy 5:17).

In the charge given to the newly invested apostle Peter, He is given the command to feed **twice**, and to rule **once**. There is surely a clear lesson here: that the prime duty of the minister is to preach the Word, and ground the people in sound doctrine, establishing them in the faith. The function of government and rule is subordinate to this; for all governance and administration in the Kingdom of God must be according to the Divine mandate declared in Scripture. Therefore, the Truth must first be taught – then it can be practically applied by the teaching elder, who must ensure it is not violated or spurned by the sheep and lambs of the fold over which the Holy Ghost has made him an overseer.

Peter learned well the truth which was communicated to him that day. Some thirty years later, writing in his epistles, he reiterated the same instruction to elders in every succeeding generation: “*The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock*” (1 Peter 5:1-3).

This is the office of Eldership: to feed and to pasture first, but also to supervise, oversee and rule. In this, lambs are involved as well as sheep – milk must be provided as well as meat. The Word of God must be carefully explained, applications made both simple and profound, so that each one receives his food in due season. The ministering elder must ever remember that he is raised to such an office, not for his own good, but for the good of others. He is but a minister, which means ‘servant’; primarily the Lord’s servant, but also the servant of the flock, both young and old.

Having outlined to Peter his life’s work, the Lord then indicates the nature of his death: *“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me”* (John 21:18-19). Touching indeed is this statement, as the Lord shows that after the toil of a long life, Peter must end his days as a martyr. History and tradition affirms this was so, and that the earthly course of this stout-hearted apostle ended in execution. Having thus spoken, the Lord adds a final charge: **“Follow Me”**. The call which first brought him to discipleship is renewed, and burns itself afresh upon his heart and mind, as his first epistle proves: *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps”* (1 Peter 2:21).

The life of Christ was one of obedience to the will of God – one of holiness in thought, word and deed. ‘This is our example’ says the aged apostle. Before the Lord returned to heaven, He taught His chosen ones the rudiments of that Kingdom: clear and direct falls the command – ‘Follow Me’. This Peter strove to do thenceforth, and ere he laid his armour down, he wrote to all who would live

thereafter: “*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation*” (1 Peter 1:13-15). The life-style of Christ is to be that of His people. It is a call to a life of holiness.

In this appearance of the risen Christ and interview with Peter, that disciple attested his love in a formal manner. Having affirmed his devotion verbally, he was commanded to prove and demonstrate its reality. It was to be done by **obedience** and by practically following His Lord and Master. “*If ye love Me, keep My commandments*” said Christ in the Upper Room. There are many in these days who suppose that love of the Lord Jesus consists only in feelings, and vents itself in rapture or ecstasy. This is a false emotionalism and spurious excitement – the Bible says that **true love** for Christ is expressed by obedience. “*If a man love Me, he will keep My words*” (John 14:23); and again, “*Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him*” (1 John 3:18-19).

Here is an application to Christians of all states and conditions – young and old. Let those who are ‘sheep’ make enquiry of themselves, whether they be in this way of obedient holiness: is there ongoing, practical sanctification, and mortifying of the flesh, and ‘going forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach’? This is a lifelong calling, from which there can be no giving up, or retirement, until the glorious end is reached. There is a message too for ‘lambs’, those who are yet upon the threshold of faith. As Peter’s example teaches, where there is a heart-love for the Lord Jesus Christ, it must be confessed verbally: *He saith ... Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee*”. There are no greater words

that human lips can frame; but accompanying this, there is an appointed way for making a public declaration: it is incumbent upon those who have received the gift of faith and love to demonstrate it in the practical act of believer's baptism. Hereby is expressed the transformation to newness of life which grace has wrought. Such are the "*things pertaining to the Kingdom of God*" so eloquently illustrated by this post-resurrection appearance.

W. H. Molland
(transcribed by R. J. Steward)

"The Christian preacher, if he is really wise, when teaching the people knowledge, will give good heed to his doctrine, that it be wholesome and nourishing, and, if possible, palatable. He will seek to find out, first, true and important thoughts, and then plain, acceptable words; and he will endeavour that his words be as goads, entering readily, and as riveted nails when they have entered, sticking fast (cf Ecclesiastes 12:13). The teaching elder ill discharges this, his highest duty, who satisfies himself with commonplace statement or empty declamation; or who spends the hours devoted to Christian instruction in metaphysical discussions, and "*questions that profit not*". It has been well said, 'To preach to show the extent of our learning or the subtlety of our wit, to blazon them in the eyes of the people with the beggarly accounts of a few words that glitter, but convey little light and less warmth, is a dishonest use of sacred time; it is not to preach the gospel, but ourselves'. It is not to feed, but starve our hearers... This duty of instruction must be performed to **all** the flock. The command of the chief Shepherd is not only "*Feed My sheep*", but also "*Feed My lambs*" (John 21:15-17)."

John Brown

SEVEN STARS

“The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in My right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.” (Revelation 1:20)

The book of the Revelation is rightly named. It is indeed a ‘drawing back of the veil’, revealing and disclosing truth to all who read therein. In chapter one, it is primarily *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him”* for upon Patmos, Christ was seen in a manner exceeding any previous appearance unto man: the apostle John beheld the Saviour in His ascended, glorified body – the form in which He will ultimately descend from Heaven *“coming in the clouds with great power and glory”* (cf Mark 13:26). In this revelation to His last surviving disciple, Christ manifested Himself upon earth one final time, portending His advent at the Last Day. In chapters four onwards, the book is a revelation of *“things which must shortly come to pass”*, as there was given to John a symbolic demonstration of future events pertaining to the final judgment, and the life hereafter. The spiritual visions which he saw and recorded were sufficient to warn, instruct and encourage the saints into a state of watchful anticipation in all subsequent generations.

Yet chapters two and three of The Revelation also give an important disclosure of Truth, of particular relevance to believers in the present time. For here, contained in seven short epistles, is a privileged insight into the New Testament Church from the Divine perspective of the Great Head Himself. It should be noted that the Lord, in this momentous and glorious appearance to His servant, chose first to address Himself to a number of local Christian Churches, and their peculiar situations and needs.

So high a position does the Church hold in the heart of the Lord Jesus, that in this extraordinary visitation He spoke directly and explicitly to seven congregations meeting in various regions of Asia Minor. He has a holy and jealous regard for His Church, because it is His building (cf Matthew 16:18), His body (cf 1 Corinthians 12:27) and His bride (cf Ephesians 5:23-25). His Divine concern extends to the order and conduct of **every** local assembly – their members, and their ministers.

What is Christ’s opinion of Christian Ministers? His charge to Peter is considered to be the first New Testament appointment of a man to this office; the responsibilities and duties associated with this work are clearly laid out on that occasion. The Lord’s command and example was followed, and by the end of the first century A.D. (when the Revelation was given) many more men had been ordained to similar positions in the Churches (cf Titus 1:5). This was all in accordance with His Divine will.

The language in which Christ describes and addresses such men is instructive and challenging. *“The seven stars are the **angels** of the seven churches”*. The word ‘angel’ as used in Revelation chapters 1 to 3 does not imply a heavenly spirit being – rather it is used of the men who held the ministerial office in each of the respective Churches. They are the addressees to whom the letters were directed: *“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write...”* (Revelation 2:1), *“Unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write...”* (Revelation 2:8), etcetera. The use of this title is entirely consistent, since the Greek word ‘angelos’ literally means a ‘messenger’ or ‘bearer of tidings’. The same word is used of John the Baptist: *“This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My **messenger** before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before thee”* (Luke 7:27). Conversely, the angels are elsewhere referred to as ‘ministering spirits’ (cf Hebrews 1:13-14). That the same title

should be afforded to angelic beings, and to earthly Christian ministers is highly significant: it implies a similarity of function.

The rôle of angels is well documented in Scripture – they give special attention to the Word of the Lord, and do all His commandments (cf Psalm 103:20); they convey messages from God to men, which they deliver without fear or favour to those to whom they are sent; they have a special care for God’s elect people (cf Psalm 91:11, Hebrews 1:14); a joy in the salvation of sinners (cf Luke 15:10) and a keen interest in the mysteries of the Faith (cf 1 Peter 1:12). If the earthly minister is to live up to his name, he should seek to emulate these same qualities that are exemplified by the angels of God.

In the imagery that John beheld, the number **seven** (denoting ‘completeness’, or ‘entirety’) is prominent. Christ singled out seven Churches of Asia Minor to be representative of all local bodies of believers in all ages. These are symbolised by seven golden candlesticks, since every Church on earth is an instrument for upholding and radiating spiritual Light. Among these candlesticks the Lord Himself walks, making Divine inspection and assessment (cf Revelation 2:1). The seven ministers responsible for their respective places of worship are typified by seven stars. This is a simple illustration of true, New Testament Church order: **seven** candlesticks, **seven** stars: to each autonomous congregation, its own independent minister. This is the Lord’s appointed pattern for companies of His people. Nowhere in Scripture is any justification found for ‘denominations’, ‘episcopacies’, ‘federations’, or centralised systems for the governance of multiple Churches. Each body of believers is answerable directly and solely to the Great Head. Each is to have its own appointed mouthpiece with special responsibility for teaching and preaching the Word. This Biblical arithmetic also precludes unregulated or undefined ministry provided by a multiplicity of brethren. For whilst the preaching gift

among members in a congregation is to be nurtured and prized, still the Scriptural pattern is that one man should have responsibility for the consecutive and systematic exposition of Truth.

The seven stars were observed by John to be in the **Lord's right hand** (cf Revelation 1:20). This position, with all it implies, teaches further lessons – both of encouragement and warning. Firstly, it denotes that ministers are to be of **His choosing** and selection. There is only one person with authority to appoint and fit a man to the ministerial office; namely Christ. It does not lie with archbishops, ecclesiastical councils, or the votes of Church members, since all authority and administrative power is granted according to the sovereignty of God. The Lord fashions and equips certain individuals to the work of ministry – it is the Church's responsibility to determine and discover God's choice. This is often shown by His granting of ability and spiritual gifts (cf Ephesians 4:11-12) and control of personal circumstances. When His will is revealed in these matters, it behoves the Church to comply.

Secondly, the location of the seven stars in Christ's right hand signifies **authority** – conferred by Him who thus holds them. This is not a case of preferment or promotion, or a hierarchy among the people of God; such would be wholly incompatible with the nature of the Church, as set forth in 1 Corinthians 12. Nevertheless, leadership and rule of the flock must be exercised, and this is the minister's charge. He must give a lead in spiritual matters, which the people can follow: *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow...Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves”* (Hebrews 13:7, 17). Being ‘in His right hand’ Christ bestows upon His ministers a degree of authority, which they must use in a gracious, equitable and righteous manner: *“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;*

Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock ” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

Thirdly, the stars, being in the Lord's hand, are **held** – they are the special objects of His Divine keeping and protection: *“Thou... savest by Thy right hand them which put their trust in Thee from those that rise up against them”* (Psalm 17:7); *“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me... Thy right hand shall save me”* (Psalm 138:7). This is a truth to comfort those ministers who on times bear the brunt of the people's criticism and the world's reproach. It is also a cautionary note against disparagement of the Lord's appointed servants, for whom He has a Divine concern and guardian care. *“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine... Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses”* (1 Timothy 5:17, 19).

Fourthly, this position in the Lord's right hand is a fearful one for those who are found there, since it is a place of **accountability**. In the judgment of the Last Day *“every one of us shall give account of himself to God”* (Romans 14:12), but to those who have held office in the Church of God comes an additional examination, as to how they have discharged their duties. Conscious of this solemn requirement, the Apostle gives exhortation: *“Obey them that have the rule over you... for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief”* (Hebrews 13:17). There is a Divine principle, *“unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more”* (Luke 12:48). No greater thing could Christ commit to the hands of men than the administration of His Church upon earth – it is a charge of immense proportions. Little wonder then, that Paul counted among his numerous tribulations *“that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches”* (2 Corinthians 11:38). There are those who

thoughtlessly crave places of superiority and responsibility among God's people – to these, a warning is given: “*My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation*” (James 3:1).

What is signified by the inspired emblem of **stars**, as observed in the Revelation? In the present day, the term ‘stars’ is synonymous with popularity, success and fame, and is used of persons who receive public acclaim or achieve a celebrity status. Nothing could be further removed from the ‘minister’, whose position is the very antithesis of these things, the word itself implying a lowly servant, or one who waits upon another's needs. Such humility and service must characterise every Christian minister. Yet still the Lord likens men of this category to stars in His hand. His Divine estimation of their accomplishments and status is entirely opposite to the world's opinions: “*whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:26-28).

Ministers are also called upon to be ‘luminaries’, and channels of spiritual light to others. In this respect, an emulation of Christ is especially involved, who is elsewhere called “*the bright and morning star*” (Revelation 22:16). Compared to Him whose “*countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength*” (Revelation 1:16), they are but lesser satellites, giving a feeble, pale reflection. Nevertheless, that faint light is God's chosen means to confirm the saints and convict sinners – “*it pleased God, through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*”. This surely is the greatest task in which a man can be spent, and ultimately will prove the most rewarding work of all, for “*they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever*” (Daniel 12:3).

R. J. Steward

THE OFFICERS OF A CHURCH, PARTICULARLY PASTORS

These are shepherds under Christ, the Great Shepherd and Overseer of Souls, who take the care of the flock, and feed it, as their name signifies; such were promised to be given under the Gospel dispensation, and such Christ has given to His churches (cf Jeremiah 3:15, Ephesians 4:11), and still gives; to whom He says, as He did to Peter, “*Feed My lambs ...Feed My sheep*” (John 21: 15, 16). These are the same as teachers, according to Ephesians 4:11, “*Some pastors and teachers*”: not ‘some pastors and some teachers’, as if they were different; but “*and teachers*”, explaining what is meant by pastors – even such who are teachers, to instruct in the knowledge of divine things, which is the pastor’s work, to feed men with knowledge and understanding...

Qualifications of Pastors: He must not only be able to teach, but he must be apt to teach (cf 1 Timothy 3:2); which aptitude lies in a good degree of elocution, and a free utterance of speech; for it is of little avail what is a man’s capacity, what the furniture of his mind, and what stock of knowledge he has, unless he can clothe his ideas with proper words to convey the understanding of them to others; the royal preacher sought to find out acceptable words (cf Ecclesiastes 12:10); such as were suitable to express his meaning, and to give delight and pleasure, as well as yield profit to them that heard him; and especially the taught words of the Holy Ghost are to be made use of. Apollos was an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, well versed in them, and which greatly improved his gift of elocution; a good textuary makes a good preacher; a free and ready utterance is necessary; such an one is like the scribe and householder (cf Matthew 13:52). The apostle Paul himself desired the Ephesians to pray for him, “*that utterance might be given me*” (Ephesians 6:19).

Work of Pastors: The chief and principle of their work is to feed the church of God committed to their care; they have the name of pastors, from ‘feeding’. Christ, “*the chief Shepherd and Overseer of Souls*” feeds His flock like a shepherd; and so it is the business of all under-shepherds to feed their respective flocks (cf 1 Peter 5:2).

Whom they are to feed:

1.) Not dogs that worry the flock; but the flock itself. The children’s bread, that which is fit and suitable food for them, is not to be taken and cast to dogs; that which is holy is not to be given to them; the Holy Word of God, its precious truths and promises, do not belong to them; nor are the holy ordinances to be administered to them; without are dogs, they are without the church, out of the flock, and so do not belong to the care and feeding of the pastors or shepherds.

2.) Nor swine; such who for the impurity of their hearts and lives, wallowing in the filth of sin, are comparable to these creatures that never look upwards, but downwards to the earth, and so fit emblems of those who mind earth and earthly things, and feed on them... pastors of churches are not swineherds, but shepherds.

3.) They are Christ’s sheep and lambs, that the pastors of churches are to feed, according to the directions given by Christ to Peter; ‘Feed My sheep, feed My lambs’, such whom Christ has an interest and property in, through the Father’s gift of them to Him, and through His laying down His life for them (cf John 10: 15, 29); and which is an argument why pastors should be careful and diligent to feed them, because they are Christ’s; **My** lambs, **My** sheep; both are to be fed; the tender lambs, otherwise new-born babes, little children, as well as the grown sheep, otherwise young men and fathers

What they are to feed the church or flock of God with:

1.) Not with chaff and husks, or what is comparable to them (cf Jeremiah 23:28); chaff is light, has no substance in it, and yields no nourishment, and is not fit for food; as bread made of wheat is, and denotes the solid and substantial doctrines of the gospel, with which the souls of men are to be fed. Husks are food for swine, but not for sheep; the externals of religion satisfy some minds, but not truly gracious souls, they cannot live upon these.

2.) Pastors of churches are to feed their flocks with such food as is suitable to lambs and sheep; milk is for tender lambs, for new-born babes who desire the sincere milk of the Word. Milk denotes the more plain and easy truths of the gospel, which are suited to tender minds; strong meat, the more sublime doctrines of it, fitter for those of full age, more grown Christians, who have a better exercise of their spiritual senses, and can discern things that differ (cf 1 Peter 2:2, 1 Corinthians 3:2, Hebrews 5:14).

3.) Sound doctrine, salutary truths, the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus, are what pastors are to teach and feed souls with; these are nourishing, while unsound doctrines, the unwholesome words of false teachers, eat as do a canker.

The matter or things they are to feed souls with, are things worthy to be known, not trifling things, matters of curiosity, and of no importance, which are vain and unprofitable, and serve to gender strife, and tend not to godly edification: not philosophy and vain deceit, or science falsely so called; nor mere human knowledge, or knowledge of natural things; but divine knowledge, knowledge of divine things; which, though a minister cannot give, he may teach and instruct; for it is the Lord that gives understanding in all things; it is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation who leads men into the knowledge of Christ; and it is the Son of God Himself who gives men an understanding to know Him that is true; yet ministers are

instruments of bringing men into acquaintance with divine things, and of their improvement in the knowledge of them; the light of divine truth shines in their hearts, that they may be able to communicate, in a ministerial way, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, of the glory of His divine perfections, displayed in the face or person, and in the work and office of Jesus Christ

By what means they are to feed the churches of Christ:

1.) The ministry of the Word, or by the preaching of the gospel; which is the means appointed by God for the gathering in of his elect ones, for the perfecting the number of them in conversion, and for the edification of the body, the church, and all its members; for their growth in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ, and of all divine things; an unpreaching pastor or elder is a contradiction in terms; and such are like those described by the prophet as blind and ignorant watchmen, dumb dogs that cannot bark, shepherds that cannot understand; who every one look for their gain from their quarter, though they do not the duty of their office.

2.) Such feed the flock, who do their work aright; give themselves up to the ministry of the Word, neglect all other services, at least as much as may be, that they may not be entangled with them, and be diverted by them, from their grand employment: to which they have devoted themselves, for the glory of God and the good of souls. Such give attendance to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine; and meditate upon these things, and give themselves wholly to them, that their profiting may appear to all, and their usefulness to many.

3.) They addict themselves to the study of sacred Scriptures more particularly; and endeavour to bring forth from thence things new and old, which may be for the use of edifying; they study to show themselves approved of God, skilful workmen, who need not to be ashamed of their ministrations, rightly dividing the word, which will not fail of feeding, more or less, the souls of men; as they have

the Word of God, the knowledge and experience of it, they are faithful to dispense it as the stewards of the mysteries of God; of whom it is required, that they be both faithful and wise.

4.) They are assiduous and constant in this work; they, as the apostles of Christ, give themselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word; do not preach a sermon only now and then, but preach the Word constantly, and are instant in season and out of season; and take every opportunity of feeding and of doing good to the souls of men; they are constant and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; knowing that their labour is not in vain in the Lord.

5.) They not only give themselves up to this work, and are studious and constant in it, but labour therein; they are not loiterers, but labourers in the Lord's vineyard; and are labourers together with Him, and are approved by Him; and their labours are blessed and succeeded among men, and they receive honour from them, of which they are worthy (cf 1 Timothy 5:17).

6.) They are careful to preach the pure and whole gospel of Christ; they study a consistence in their ministry, that it be not yea and nay, and contradict itself; they are not of them that corrupt the word with human doctrine and the inventions of men; but speak it with all sincerity, renouncing all arts of dishonesty, commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God; keeping back no part of divine truth, but declaring the whole of what is revealed in the Word of God, so far as they have knowledge of it; and such are more or less blessed for the feeding the flock and church of God.

Another part of the work of pastors, is to rule the church they take the oversight of; as guides, governors and rulers; and obedience to

them is required, “*Obey them that have the rule over you*” (Hebrews 13:17). And their [responsibility] in the church appears:

- 1.) In giving the lead in divine worship; they go before the congregation in acts of divine service, in public prayer and thanksgiving, and in the ministry of the Word (cf Revelation 4:9-10; 5:14); and this they do in an authoritative way; they are the mouth of the people to God, and present their prayers and thanksgivings as representing them; and they are the mouth of God to the people, and speak in His name, and are ambassadors in Christ’s stead.
- 2.) In presiding at church meetings; where they have the conduct of all affairs with order and decency, directing in all acts of discipline, according to the Word of God.
- 3.) In receiving and rejecting members; the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the gospel church, as usually understood, are committed to them, to open and shut the doors of the church according to its direction; for though the power of admission and rejection of members is originally in the church, it is executively in the pastors, in the name of the church.
- 4.) In taking care of the discipline of the church of God, that it is observed, and that the rules respecting it are put in to execution; which they are to explain, enforce, and see they are attended to; they are to show to the house, the church of God, “*the form of the house, and the fashion of it*”; the nature of it, as to matter, form, power and order; “*and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof*”; the rules respecting the reception of members, and the excommunication of them; “*and all the ordinances, and all the laws thereof*”, even every thing Christ has commanded and appointed to be observed (Ezekiel 43:10,11).

John Gill
from ‘*A Body of Divinity*’

Editorial

There is a considerable and commendable emphasis upon ‘gospel preaching’ from many pulpits in the present day. The primary and greatest message which the church has to declare to the world is the Way of Salvation. Every preacher or pastor must of necessity also be an evangelist, for “*we preach Christ and Him crucified*” and indeed “*woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel*” (1 Corinthians 1:23, 9:16). However, the same apostle who spoke these words could also testify: “*I have not shunned to declare unto you **all the counsel of God***” (Acts 20:27).

‘Emphasis’ is inclined to become ‘imbalance’; and it is evident that the ‘general call’ to faith is rapidly displacing ministry upon all other aspects of Truth and doctrine. To preach a simple ‘gospel message’ to a congregation of saved persons is popular, easy and uncontroversial; but it is wholly insufficient for their needs. The minister who routinely targets ‘goats’, whilst neglecting to feed the ‘sheep’ is in dereliction of his duty. The church is called “*the flock of God*”, and its pastor described as a shepherd – thus his first care and responsibility is clear. The point is further reinforced by the Lord’s commission to Peter, whose primary task was to ‘strengthen his brethren’, and feed Christ’s sheep.

It is a sad fact that numerous congregations of saints suffer from a paucity of Biblical teaching. They do not grow or develop spiritually, because they are never led into new pastures. A rising generation of young Christians have been rushed straight from conversion into the ‘outreach’ activities of their churches, without ever learning more than a few elementary details of The Faith. Scripture bemoans such a situation: “*ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God...Therefore, leaving the principles...let us go on to perfection; not laying again the foundation...*” (Hebrews 5:12, 6:1). What is

the cause of this sorry state of affairs among Christ's sheep? It is not for any lack of good grazing – because this God's Word provides in unfailing supply; soul-food rich and varied, and "*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Timothy 3:16).

No, the blame lies squarely with those ministers who detain the flock in the foothills of Christianity; never guiding them upwards to loftier heights of doctrine; never weaning the lambs on to 'strong meat', but allowing them instead to languish on a liquid diet of insubstantial epilogues and evangelistic sermonettes.

What is it to truly preach the gospel? To see sinners saved, and then remain forever in spiritual infancy? No – when an individual is converted, the preaching of the 'good news' unto them has only just begun, and must go on to sustain and increase them with its inexhaustible fullness, throughout their Christian life. To administer this ongoing provision is the bounden duty of all evangelists, pastors and teachers: "*the perfecting of the saints, ...the work of the ministry, ...the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we... speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ*" (Ephesians 2:12-15).

Preliminary Announcement

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 7th & Lord's Day 8th June 2008 D.V.

Preacher: Mr Michael Harley
(Friston, Suffolk)