

The Character of a Pastor According to God's Heart Considered

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by
John Shaw, A.M.
Pastor of a Church in Bridgewater, MA

“I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” Jeremiah 3:15

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God whom the Father gave to be Head over all things to the Church, has, for the good of His spiritual kingdom, been pleased to institute and appoint the gospel ministry. Gospel ministers are an order of men necessary to the well-being of the Church of Christ through all ages and times. They are called of God not only to administer the seals of the new and everlasting covenant, but also to preach the great truths of the gospel for the enlargement and edification of the Church, for the recovery of fallen men sunk in ignorance and wickedness, to the knowledge and worship of the one living and true God, and faith in the one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. For how shall men believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and “how shall they hear without a preacher?” In the writings of the Old Testament are prophecies and promises concerning a ministry to obtain in the days and under the kingdom of the Messiah. Such a prophecy is that in Isaiah 66:21–22: “I will take of them,” namely the converted Gentiles, “for priests and for Levites,” that is, for gospel ministers; for the worship and the church officers to take place in gospel times are, by Isaiah and the other holy prophets, often represented to us under titles and phrases proper to the Old Testament dispensation. And, according to verse 22 these shall remain invariable to the end of time: “For, as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make (it intends the state of the gospel church, which should be erected in the days of the Messiah) shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain.” A promise to the same purpose is in the words of my text: “And I will give you pastors.” The words have reference, as expositors observe, to gospel times. It is a promise to be fulfilled under the

kingdom of the Messiah. It is a promise which, for seventeen hundred years, has been fulfilling from age to age and is fulfilling at this day. Jesus Christ, the chief Shepherd, who has a tender regard for His flock, who purchased it with His own blood and laid down His life for the sheep, has been, from time to time, and still is, giving them ministers of this character. The ministers of Christ, the preachers of His gospel, are designated as "pastors" in my text. They have this denomination given them by the Apostle in Ephesians 4:11: "And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry." It's their office, their business, to give out spiritual food to the several flocks over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers. I Peter 5:1-2: "The elders which are among you, I exhort, feed the flock of God." Agreeably, the promise in our text is, "I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you."

In discoursing these words, suitable for our present thought and meditation, I would, as God shall assist, take occasion to consider when it may be said that ministers are according to God's heart; that ministers of this character are God's gifts; what the special duty of that people is toward their minister unto whom God is giving a pastor according to His heart; and then, last, apply the subject.

I am, first, to consider when it may be said of ministers that they are according to God's heart.

Here in general observe that they are such when, in spirit, principle, and practice, they answer the Scriptural character of a gospel minister; when they are such in nature of a God-like temper and spirit, and so believe, so preach, and so live as to find acceptance with God through Jesus Christ. In brief, to be a pastor according to God's heart is, as the Apostle observes concerning Timothy, to be "a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:6). The phrase is comprehensive, and implies several things.

First, ministers according to God's heart are men in Christ. They are in a state of conversion; they have experienced a supernatural change, a change from nature to grace, the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. They are partakers of the new and divine nature; the Holy Ghost dwells in them. Until men are born again, they are unfit, unsuitable persons to be masters and teachers in God's Israel. A minister, if unregenerate, if out of Christ, in attending the several parts of his ministry, can act from no higher principle than nature; not with a single eye to the divine glory, not with a sincere aim and view to building up the church and kingdom of Christ. There can be no such thing as a gracious sincerity in him, only the reign and prevalence of a selfish spirit—the wolf's body under the sheep's clothing; a plausible tongue but an unsanctified nature.

It very much concerns a minister to have a gospel temper and spirit, a spirit sanctified by the Holy Ghost, a regenerate soul purged from vicious appetites and inclinations, fitted and suited to the spiritual and holy service of God. Indeed, this concerns professors in general, but especially ministers, and it is a just reproach to any who are called "Masters in Israel" to have no experimental acquaintance with the mystery of the New Birth. Those are certainly best able to preach faith, repentance, and regeneration to others who, besides the notion of these things in their heads, have experienced the reality and power of them in their own hearts. It is a very difficult thing, indeed, for a man to teach others who is not, in the first place, himself taught of God, that is, in a saving manner enlightened to know God and Christ, whom to know is life eternal.

It's true, as one observes, that God can work by what means He will, even by a scandalous, domineering, self-seeking preacher, but it is not His usual way. Foxes and wolves are not nature's instrument to generate sheep. Whoever knew much good done to souls by any pastors but such as preached and lived in the power of love, working by a clear, convincing light, and both managed by a holy, lively seriousness? You must bring fire if you would kindle fire.

Pastors according to His heart, in entering into the work of the gospel ministry, and in their attendance to it, act from love to Christ with an eye to the divine glory, the honor of the great Redeemer, the advancement of His kingdom in the conversion of sinners and salvation of precious souls. But how is this possible to unregenerate men? How is this possible until men are in Christ themselves?

Second, pastors according to God's heart, as they are men in Christ and have a renewed, sanctified nature, live godly in Christ Jesus. They are of a blameless character. Their conversation is in heaven. It is as becomes the gospel. Their light shines in an example of good works; they bring forth good fruits. They are created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that they, and all the people of Christ, should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). And indeed, as to good works, these they recommend and inculcate in the course of their ministry from time to time, frequently putting their hearers in mind of their duty to carefully perform them. To this purpose the holy apostle, in his charge to Titus, his own son after the common faith says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8), or as the original word imports, might "excel" in them. It concerns those who are preachers of the gospel as much as any to be inoffensive and blameless in their lives, to give no offense by falling into sin and wickedness; for this will have a natural tendency to prejudice the cause of Christ, to render

their persons contemptible, their ministry despised, the most sacred administrations of God's house and day slighted and condemned. Certainly, then, it behoves ministers to be blameless, not under the just imputation or charge of scandal, to be vigilant, wakeful and watchful, quick to spy out danger, being, as it were, full of eyes. They must be sober, masters of their appetites and passions, holding them under a curb and restraint; of good behavior, not morose and sour, but affable, obliging and courteous, of a composed temper and grave; given to hospitality, not close and covetous, but of a charitable and generous spirit. 1 Timothy 4:12: "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

To what purpose is it for ministers to pray and preach like eminent saints, to appear like angels in the pulpit, if their conversation doesn't savor piety and holiness when they are out of it? It is an indisputable maxim, an everlasting truth, that the life of a minister is the life of his ministry, and that the sins of teachers are the teachers of sins. It is an inexcusable fault in a preacher when the crimes and sins which he condemns in others are justly chargeable upon himself. "Thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" (Romans 2:21-22).

There are some sins in preachers which, in a more special manner, are extremely prejudicial to their ministry. These the Word of God cautions every minister against in particular. 1 Timothy 3:3, 6: ". . . not given to wine, no striker, not a brawler, not greedy of filthy lucre, not covetous, not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." The immoral, scandalous minister, being an agent in the devil's kingdom, instead of converting sinners is more likely to make them hardened atheists. Actions speak louder than words. Examples influence more than precepts. Ministers of this character—immoral or unholy in their lives—are habitually careless of their own souls. Is it probable, then, that such as these will take a faithful care of the souls of the hearers? If not afraid of running into the fire themselves, will they be zealous to pull their hearers out of the flames? If they do not tremble at the thought of trifling themselves with heaven and hell, with salvation and damnation, will they faithfully warn their hearers against the danger of doing so? It is only then that ministers may encourage themselves in the prospect of joyful success, when they can say to their hearers, as holy Paul said to the people of Corinth, "Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ," or as valiant Gideon said to his soldiers, "Look upon me and do likewise." Ministers of this character are according to God's heart.

Third, ministers according to God's heart are men of sound principles. They are sound in the faith. The doctrine taught by them is after godliness. It is the truth, not error and heresy. When the Son of God, the risen Jesus, sent forth the Apostles, He instructed them what they should preach, namely the gospel (Mark 16:15), or as it is expressed in Matthew 28:19: "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The truths and doctrines of that gospel which is to be preached by Christ's ministers are one and the same throughout all generations and times. "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel than that we have preached, let him be accursed," said the apostle in Galatians 1:8. Those who in the apostolic age were separated to the work of the ministry had a very strict charge given them with respect to sound doctrine. So had Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:13: "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 4:1: "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead, at His appearing and His kingdom; preach the Word." By this he means the truths of the Word of God, not the fancies, not the notions and inventions of men. And such is his charge to Titus, another minister of Christ, in Titus 2:1: "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine." Note verse 7: "In doctrine showing uncorruptness, sound speech that cannot be condemned." Error is dangerous, yes, heresy is damnable. It is so to the impenitent, seducing heretic himself. 2 Peter 2:1: "There were false prophets also among them, there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, and bring upon themselves swift destruction, whose judgment lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."

And as it is damnable to the preacher, so it is to the hearers when entertained, received, and acted upon by them. 2 Timothy 2:17: "Their words will eat as doth a canker," or like a mortal gangrene.

Sound doctrine nourishes the soul. It is reviving, strengthening, and refreshing to it; but error in judgment distempers and destroys the soul and is damnable, as well as sin in practice. See 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12. It is "the faith once delivered to the saints"; it is not the fancies, not the imaginary dreams and notions of men which the ministers of Christ must earnestly contend for. Error is from the devil. It is the water cast out of the serpent's mouth. Revelation 12:15: "The serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood." It may intend a flood of errors.

But when may it be said of ministers that they are of sound principles, men sound in the faith? I answer, in a word, when their teaching and preaching, with respect to the matter of it, is manifestly contained in, or by just and necessary consequence deducible

from, the inspired oracles of truth, and these understood according to the analogy of faith, and agreeable to the design of the Holy Ghost in the inspired penmen. For all principles must be brought to the touchstone of Scripture, as all weights and measures are brought to their standard. "To the law and to the testimony. We have a more sure word of prophecy."

Fourth, ministers according to God's own heart are men of good knowledge, men of understanding in the things of God. To this purpose I go to the words of my text: "I will give you pastors according to Mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." If they are not men of knowledge and understanding themselves, it would be impossible to discharge that part of their office which lies in teaching and instructing the people. That knowledge now considered has reference to the head as well as the heart; not merely to Christian experiences, without a disciplinary understanding of divine truths. Indeed, there may be light in the head, or knowledge of the doctrinal kind, where there is no grace in the heart; but there cannot be grace in the heart without light in the head, no gracious experiences without a doctrinal knowledge. For, as one justly observes, heart-knowledge without head-knowledge is nonsense in divinity as well as reason. It is like fire without heat if it is a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. It cannot be supposed that such will do most who know least; as if the best servants were least acquainted with their master's will! In a word, ministers who are according to God's heart have, in their various measures, knowing heads and gracious hearts, too. For a minister to feed his hearers with knowledge and understanding, and yet not be a man of knowledge and understanding himself, is as impossible as it is to see without eyes or to hear without ears. In such a case, how is it possible that he could teach and instruct his hearers, that he could reason with them out of the Book of God, give the sense, and cause them to understand the reading? Will that man, as a faithful shepherd, guide the flock and keep off the wolf who doesn't know the wolf from the sheep, who can't distinguish truth from error, the sound doctrines of the gospel from the corrupt glosses of the Pharisee?

Among other qualifications of a faithful minister, this is to be considered a cardinal one: that he is able to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). In a word, babes in knowledge are very unfit to be teachers of the mysteries of God. Novices are very unsuitable persons to be set up as stars in the candlesticks of Christ. Ignorant, unskillful, unexperienced men, babes in understanding, if put into the ministry, instead of enlarging are more likely to pull down the kingdom of Christ and expose that gospel to contempt which is so glorious and excellent in itself.

Fifth, ministers according to God's heart are men of prayer. They are much in prayer. The apostle said in Acts 6:4, "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the

ministry of the Word." It was the commendation of Epaphras, a minister of Christ, that he was "always laboring fervently in prayers" (Colossians 4:12). If any men in the world need the special presence of God with them, and His blessing in order to succeed, certainly ministers do. For what is the design and end of their ministry? Is it not to open the eyes of sinners, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and Satan to God in Christ? And "who is sufficient for these things?" In a work of this nature, what can ministers, of themselves, do? Verily, they may preach even to paleness and faintness, until the bellows are burnt, until their lungs and vitals are consumed, and their hearers will never be the better; not one sinner will be converted until God is graciously pleased, by the efficacious working of His Spirit, to add His blessing to their labors and make His Word, in the mouth of the preacher, sharper than any two-edged sword in the heart of the hearer. All will be in vain, to no saving purpose, until God is pleased to give the increase. And in order to do this, God looks for their prayers to come up to His ears. He will, for this, be inquired of by ministers to do it for them. A praying minister is in the way to have a successful ministry. If he first steeps that seed in prayers and tears in the closet which he afterwards sows among the people of his charge from the pulpit, he may then encourage himself in the prospect of a joyful harvest. The fervent, effectual prayer of a gracious minister avails much.

Sixth, ministers according to God's heart are men of a humble spirit. They do not think themselves suitably dressed to come into the pulpit until they are clothed with humility and, in regard of a lowly spirit, bear some resemblance to the humble Jesus. This dress very well suits and becomes them. Their shining in this will add a luster to all their other graces and virtues. And in this, the incarnate Son of God has set them an admirable example. John 13:15: "I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done." Ministers, though their office is high and sacred, should not think any service beneath them or too inferior, wherein they may be the means of promoting the cause and kingdom of Christ. Jesus Himself has taught them otherwise, both by precept and example. A proud, haughty, aspiring, ambitious spirit is hateful in all, especially in them, and extremely prejudicial to their ministry. Lording it over God's heritage, treating the people of their charge with insolence and contempt, renders them guilty, indeed, and is expressly forbidden. 1 Peter 5:3: "Not as being lords over God's heritage." And so is likewise the affectations of supremacy, the love of pre-eminence among themselves: "But it shall not be so among you" (Matthew 20:26). Alas, how disagreeable the sight of the servant aspiring to be greater than his lord, to see a humble prince and a proud minister! Indeed, that humble spirit in pastors according to God's heart does not oblige them to the utmost intimacy and freeness of conversation with

everyone indifferently, for an unguarded familiarity breeds contempt. They should not make themselves cheap and common in every company; they should be light, airy, and vain in none.

Seventh, ministers according to God's heart are men of wisdom and prudence. As the Proverb says, "He that winneth souls is wise." Agreeably, it's said elsewhere, "Who is that wise servant?" The end and design of the gospel ministry (which is the conversion of sinners and the edification of the people of Christ) calls for the exercise of wisdom: wisdom in the choice of the most fit, seasonable and suitable subjects from time to time, wisdom in the choice of fit and suitable expressions such as are decent and grave, becoming the majesty of God and the importance of religion, such as are easy and familiar to hearers. They are on one hand instructive and convincing, and upon the other hand apt to excite and move the affections. They must show wisdom as it concerns the government and discipline of the church, more especially in laboring to recover those who are left to fall into error in judgment or any scandalous sin in practice; not being too rigorous and severe, nor too indulgent and remiss, considering men's tempers, their trials and temptations, and applying to them accordingly, becoming all things to all men, like the holy and wise apostle, as far as it will serve the interest and kingdom of Christ. And thus, in conversation, especially among the people of their charge, there is need of the exercise of wisdom in consulting their various tempers, and making application to them by way of counsel, warning, and instruction at the most suitable time, under the most suitable providences, and in the most obliging manner. They must reprove them so as not to provoke, and yet with so much zeal and affection as will tend to impress them with a sense of their obligations to reform: grave and yet not morose; affable and pleasant, and yet not light and vain; free and familiar, yet not mean, cheap, or common; maintaining their dignity, and yet not behaving so as to lord it over others; meek, gentle, and condescending, and yet not letting themselves be trodden under foot without resentment. In regard of these things, wisdom is profitable to direct.

In the next place, ministers according to God's heart are men of resolution and courage; not easily surprised and dashed out of countenance, not of a fearful, timorous spirit but, like the righteous of whom Solomon observes, they are bold as a lion. In short, the dove's innocence, the serpent's eye, the lion's courage, and a seraph's zeal all very well become a gospel minister.

Again, ministers according to God's heart are men of a patient spirit. Patience is one of those orient graces which must shine in their character. 1 Timothy 3:3: "Not given to wine, no striker, but patient." 2 Timothy 2:24: "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle

to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." They must not irritate and provoke such as differ or disagree with them in opinion and judgment. By words that are soft and gentle, though by arguments that are hard and close, they must endeavor to inform their judgments, convince their consciences, and rectify their mistakes. They must not suffer their resentment and passion to rise upon every affront given. They must not be sinfully angry and easily provoked. They must bear, forbear, and forgive; they must keep down all exorbitant passion and hold their resentment under a curb and restraint. For "a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry" (Titus 1:7). Alas, how pernicious, how extremely prejudicial to the building up of Zion, is a fiery, wrathful, resentful spirit in those who preach the gospel? How opposite to the lamb-like temper, the dove-like spirit of the patient and humble Jesus who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, and when He suffered, He threatened not? Oh, how wicked, ungodly men reviled Christ while here on earth! Had He not a thousand scandals, slanders, reproaches, and blasphemies cast upon Him? Yet He reviled not again. Did not Christ suffer? Were not all manner of injuries and abuses cast upon Him at once? Did they not buffet, spit upon Him, crown Him with thorns, and nail Him to the cross when, at the same time, He had power to have looked His enemies into nothing or could have frowned them into hell? And yet He did not so much as threaten them, but prayed for His very murderers. "Father, forgive them." Here, here is a pattern for gospel ministers! And so, for Christians of a private character, under revilings and reproaches, let them do as Christ did and commit themselves "to Him that judgeth righteously."

Again, let it be further observed that ministers according to God's heart will endeavor to be plain, close, and particular in their addresses to souls, both in the pulpit and also in conversation among the people of their charge as they have opportunity. They will endeavor, from time to time, to have a seasonable word suited to their state and circumstances: a word for careless, secure, unawakened sinners; a word for sinners under convictions; a word for hypocrites, formalists, justiciaries (those who hold that they can, of themselves, attain to righteousness); a word for them who are in Christ when under temptations, when in darkness, or when walking in the light of God's countenance; a word for little children, young men, and fathers.

In a word, ministers according to God's heart preach Jesus Christ. Christ is the end, the scope, and the design of their ministry. That design is to bring sinners to Christ, to build up believers in Christ. They preach Christ in His person, Christ in His natures, Christ in His offices, Christ with the free offers and tenders of His grace, Christ in His righteousness, Christ with His unsearchable riches, Christ in His ordinances, in the laws of His kingdom,

and so on. To preach all in generals is little to the purpose. The application is the life and soul of a sermon. It is so when the several sorts of men in the assembly are considered and suitably addressed.

I proceed now to another general head of discourse from the text: such pastors are God's gifts. The text says, "I will give you pastors according to Mine heart." To the same purpose the apostle says in Ephesians 4:8, 11, "Wherefore He saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And He gave some apostles, and some pastors and teachers." With respect to such pastors, it is God who raises them up, and qualifies and prepares them for the high and sacred office of the ministry. He orders the time and place of their birth, and the means, opportunities, and advantages of their education. It is God who apprehends them by His Spirit and grace, forming Christ in their hearts and setting up His spiritual kingdom there. The gifts, graces, virtues, and ministerial accomplishments necessary to a right discharge of their sacred office are of God's bestowing (1 Corinthians 12:8ff). The bias upon their hearts to enter upon the work of the ministry is of God's forming, and so is that upon the hearts of a people by whom they are invited and called to take the pastoral care and charge of them in the Lord. And being thus invited and called, it is God who disposes the heart of a gracious minister to accept the invitation, the call given. And as ministers of a gracious character are God's gifts, so they are precious and valuable gifts. It is a great favor, a blessing indeed, from God to a people when He gives them a pastor according to His heart. But I hasten on.

I wish to consider briefly what the special duty of that people is to their minister unto whom God gives a pastor according to His heart.

1. They should love, honor, and esteem him very highly. Their love, honor, and esteem should be real, inward, and hearty, but not limited and confined to the heart. It should appear in the outward acts and expressions of reverence, love, and respect. Hear the apostle in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know 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 sake."

2. They should attend upon his administrations with love and delight, constantly and seasonably. They should cordially entertain the message which, in the name of God, he dispenses to them from Sabbath to Sabbath, the Word of God preached by him both in season and out of season. They should not slight or despise his person, undervalue his ministry, or be absent from it. They should receive him as one of the precious and purchased gifts of the ascended Jesus. They should be duly subject and hearken unto him as being an officer

which King Jesus has constituted and set up in His Church. So much as this is implied in the words of the apostle in Hebrews 13:17: "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give an account."

3. They should be much in prayer to God for him. The best minister in the world, though abounding in gifts and graces, is yet desirous to have the pious and godly among his hearers sensible that he needs them, as was the apostle. Romans 15:30: "Now I beseech you brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me, in your prayers to God for me." So it is in Ephesians 6:18-19: "Praying always . . . for me that utterance may be given me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel". If such a minister of Christ as the apostle, who was filled with the Holy Ghost in an extraordinary manner, yet needed and desired the prayers of the godly, certainly, then, the ordinary and standing ministers of the gospel need them. And if they need and desire the prayers of a people, it is the duty of a people to pray for them.

4. They should give to such a minister an honorable support. 1 Corinthians 9:14: "Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel."

Application

What remains now is the application. And here I might enlarge in many useful reflections, but time will not allow it. I must conclude with a few words by way of address to my reverend fathers and brethren in the ministry, and to him who is now to be separated to the work of the ministry by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, and then to the church and people of Christ in this place.

Will you then, my reverend fathers and brethren here present, allow me, with proper deference and respect, in the name of God, to put the solemn question to you and to myself: Is ours the character of pastors according to God's heart? Are we, ourselves, men in Christ? Not not only by profession, but by regeneration, being indeed born again? Is the kingdom of Christ within us? Do we live godly in Christ Jesus? Are we holy, gracious, and blameless in our lives, of a good conversation in Christ? Are we truly men of sound principles, according to Scripture revelation? Are we men of understanding in the things of God so as to be able to teach others, and to feed them with knowledge and understanding? Are we, ourselves, men of prayer? Do we first steep that seed in prayers and tears which we afterwards sow among the people of our charge? Is ours the character of the wise and meek, the humble, patient, and courageous? Are we plain and close and particular in our addresses

to souls, both in the preaching of the Word of God, and also in conversation among the people of our charge, as opportunity presents, rightly dividing the word of truth and giving to everyone their portion in due season? Oh, let us make diligent search as to these things! Opportunities of grace, respecting ourselves, are uncertain, and our time of serving the kingdom of Christ in the conversion of our hearers is short. Our fathers in the ministry, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? We see they are not suffered to continue by reason of death. And because our time is short, our charge awful and solemn, our business weighty and important, and the consequence either heaven or hell, salvation or damnation, let us, therefore, be sober and vigilant. Let us watch unto prayer and make full proof of our ministry.

Is there no danger lest we, as well as the souls of our hearers, miscarry and be lost forever? Did never anyone prophesy in the name of Christ, and yet, after this, perish in His wrath? Did never anyone cast devils out of others, and yet, at last, be cast out to devils themselves? How amazing and dreadful is the thought that we should come and go from the place of the holy, and this from Sabbath to Sabbath, perhaps for whole years of Sabbaths, and pray and preach in the name of Christ, at least pretendedly, and administer the holy Sacraments, and yet, after all this, perish with the workers of iniquity!

Alas, what a dreadful exchange is this, to go from the house of God to the prison of hell; from the enjoying of Sabbath privileges, and performing divine service on the Lord's Day as the masters of assemblies, to dwell in that place of torments where a dungeon is the house, devils and our guilty consciences the preachers, death and damnation the subject! The day, verily, is hastening when we, as well as our hearers, must be called to give an account. This will be a blessed, joyful day, indeed, to pastors according to God's heart who have fed their hearers with knowledge and understanding; but it will be awful and dreadful to unfaithful shepherds who, perhaps, in doctrine have preached Christ to others, and yet lived and died out of Christ themselves. God has cast our lot in a time and day which, upon many accounts is very remarkable; a day which, like the pillar of the cloud and fire, has its bright side and its dark side. God grant that we may have wisdom and grace, light and courage, earnestly to contend for the faith, once delivered to the saints, and so to conduct in such a day as this that ours may be the character of pastors according to God's heart.

I would now apply myself to you in particular, dear sir, at whose desire I undertook the present service; whose exemplary shining in grace here, as a pastor according to God's heart, and whose future shining as the stars forever and ever in the kingdom of glory. I would rejoice to be in any way serviceable, by the help of grace, to further and promote. The charge you are about to receive is awful and solemn. The work before you is weighty and

important. The consequence before you, both to yourself and your hearers, is much to be regarded, and will be joyful or sorrowful as you are faithful or unfaithful in it, as you are found or not found a pastor according to God's heart. Let me, therefore, exhort and beseech you, in the language of the apostle in 1 Timothy 4:16: "Take heed unto thyself and to thy doctrine; continue in them, for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." The work before you is great; it is weighty; it is very important. You are called to it in a time and place when and where you may expect great difficulties, perhaps uncommon trials. Keep your eyes fixed upon Christ. Let those promises and declarations of His be your encouragement: "Lo, I am with you always," and "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Dear sir, the time is coming when you and I, in a vastly more solemn and august assembly, before God and Christ, must appear and come under examination as to whether we have been pastors according to God's heart or not. The good Lord grant that you and I may obtain mercy and grace to be found faithful; that, when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, we may receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away. Amen.

I shall now conclude with a few words to the church and people of Christ in this place.

Brethren, there is one whom you have invited to the work of the ministry among you to be now solemnly set apart to this high and sacred office by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, and, as we trust he will be found among you a pastor according to God's heart, we exhort you to receive him as one of this character, and as a valuable gift of our ascended Savior. "Receive him in the Lord, with all gladness, and hold such in reputation." Let him be with you without fear. Let no man despise him. Let him obtain honor, love, and respect from you. Cheerfully communicate to him of your temporal goods for, as I have before observed, "So hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Encourage him in the work of the ministry by hearkening to the solemn counsels, warnings, and charges which, in the name of God and agreeable to the Word of truth, he may from time to time dispense to you. Join with him in your hearty and fervent prayers that his may be a successful ministry, that gracious souls may be built up, and many sons and daughters born to Christ under his administrations.

Don't weaken his hands at any time by contentions and divisions. It is a matter of grief and lamentation that there have been such unhappy differences in sentiment, and such disaffections prevailing among the people of this place. Our heart's desire and prayer to God for you is that, instead of these, there may be one heart and one spirit among you, even as "there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope of our calling, one God and Father," of whom are all things, and to whom are all things; that the people of this place may "above all things put on charity, and be kind one to another, tender-hearted,

forbearing one another, and forgiving one another," as ever they hope to find forgiveness with God in Christ. And the good Lord grant that the people of this society, under the ministrations of him who is this day to be set as a light in this candlestick of Christ, may rejoice many years in His light, and when he shall have turned many to righteousness, even of your children and children's children, you may all at last, with him, shine forever "as the sun in the kingdom of our heavenly Father." Amen and Amen.

Mr. Taft's Confession of Faith

I believe the existence of one supreme Being, who is possessed of all possible perfection and glory; who is the Creator, Upholder, and Governor of all things.

I believe that in the Godhead there are three persons, namely, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and that these three are the same in substance, have in them all the perfections of the divine nature, and are equal in power and glory.

I believe God has, from all eternity, fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass; yet not so as in any degree to become the author of sin, or to destroy the moral agency in His rational creatures, and lay any constraint on the will of His creatures to sin, in order to bring about the divine decrees.

I believe God did, at first, make man holy and upright, after His own image and likeness; furnished him with the skill and ability requisite to yield that obedience which was due from him, and gave him power to have continued in the estate wherein he was created; but man, being left to the freedom of his own will, was overcome by the temptation of the serpent to eat of the forbidden fruit; and so fell from the rectitude he was created in by sinning against God; and Adam, being appointed of God to be the federal head and representative of mankind, by his disobedience plunged himself and his posterity into a state of sin and misery.

I believe that God has, from everlasting, elected to salvation a certain number of the race of mankind; not for any thing He saw in them more than in those who were not chosen by Him.

I believe that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is the one only Mediator between God and men; and that it is by the merits of Christ, and His imputed righteousness, and through faith only, that salvation is obtained by any of the fallen race of mankind.

I believe the doctrines of repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ are necessary means, appointed of God for man's acceptance in His sight; and also the necessity of regeneration, or the New Birth; and that those who are born again by the Spirit of God are now justified and shall be progressively sanctified, and be made, through grace, to persevere unto eternal life.

I believe the absolute necessity of the special assistance of the Holy Spirit of God to begin and carry on the good work of grace in men's hearts; without which no man is capable to perform any religious duty acceptable to God.

I believe that the light of nature is not sufficient to lead and direct men, in their present lapsed estate, in the way to true and final happiness, as the mind and conscience is naturally defiled.

I believe God has, out of His infinite mercy, given a complete revelation of His mind and will in His Holy Word (the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testament) as to all things necessary to be known for the salvation of sinners: which I receive as coming from God and resolve, by the grace of God assisting me, to make the rule of my faith and practice.

I believe the immortality of the soul; that the soul exists after the separation is made by death, between the soul and body; and that, at death, the soul passes immediately into a perpetual state of happiness or misery.

Finally, I believe the resurrection of the body to a final judgment when the future and eternal state of all men shall be determined by Christ, the glorious Judge, at His second coming in the end of the world; when everyone shall be judged in righteousness, and shall receive the things done in His body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or evil.

Moses Taft

The Charge

Given by the Reverend Mr. Samuel Niles, of Braintree; with the Introduction, which (in sum) was as follows:

The present solemnity should remind us of that great and undeniable truth, namely, that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep and glorious Head of His church, ever has had, and to the end of time will have, a church in the world; against which the gates of hell, the powers of darkness, never have been and never shall be able to prevail. As a proof hereof, Christ has appointed a succession of the gospel ministry, to act for and under Him in His ecclesiastical kingdom through all ages of men, to whom He has promised His gracious presence, even to the end of the world and who, by His appointment, are to be set apart to that honorable and important work by solemn ordination with fasting and prayer and laying on of hands.

And lest any should suppose that the imposition of hands in ordaining ministers to their office to be of mere human invention, or only received by tradition, I shall endeavor to show on this occasion the divine right, as well as antiquity of this usage in the church and among the people of God; a usage founded on Scripture precepts and examples, and practiced in the primitive ages both before and in the time of the Law, as well as under the brightest shines of the gospel, in cases religious and not in those only of a civil nature.

It was used sometimes in pronouncing a blessing. Thus Jacob, while he blessed Joseph's two sons, laid his hands on their heads, guided therein by the spirit of prophecy (Genesis 48:13-14). And thus our Savior, having little children brought to Him for His blessing, put His hands upon them and blessed them (Matthew 19:15; Mark 10:16). So we, in putting our hands on this servant of the Lord, do wish and, according to our measure, do pronounce a

In like manner, such as offered sacrifice under the Law were directed to lay their hands on the head of the offering, partly in token of their devoting the same to the Lord (Leviticus 3:2, 8:13). Thus, as an offering (we trust) of a sweet-smelling savor to God through Christ, we lay our hands on this His servant, and present him a spiritual sacrifice to God. And when Moses set Joshua apart as the leader of God's Israel, he was ordered to lay his hand on him and to give him a charge before, or in the sight of, the people (Numbers 27:18, 23). This also shows the propriety of laying on of hands in the present case, as this the Lord's servant is set before this people with a solemn charge laid on him to be faithful. But to come more directly to the affair of the present day, we find that, in the designation of person to the sacred employment of the gospel ministry, they laid their hands on them (Acts 13:3), commissioning them, and commending them to the grace of God for that work. Thus ministers are to be ordained with fasting and prayer, and "with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14). I shall only add the example of our blessed Savior, when He called and appointed John the Divine to preach and publish the visions He showed him in the Isle of Patmos, which have firstly a special relation to the seven churches in Asia, yet also to all the churches of Christ to the end of the world. "He laid His right hand upon him" (Revelation 1:17), as an external sign and seal of his commission, and an attestation of his qualifications for the service He sent him upon.

For as much, then, as this practice of laying on of hands has been in use in the church of God, from ancient times and under different administrations, on various religious occasions, and as we have a plain gospel direction enjoining this mode of laying on of the hands of the Presbytery in the ordination of ministers, none ought to account it merely traditional, but sacred and of divine right.

The church and people of God in this place, having been led, we hope, by His gracious, sovereign providence to make choice of this, His servant, to be set over them in the Lord, to minister to them in holy things, as they have now renewed and confirmed their choice in the view and presence of this great assembly, and he, having also manifested his acceptance of their call; we therefore, being presbyters in the several churches to which we belong, and having the concurrence of our reverend brethren, with the delegates of the churches in this venerable council now convened on this affair of Christ's kingdom, do now solemnly put our hands on him, uniting in our prayers to God, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, for direction, assistance, and for a blessing on the important services of the day.

Dear brother, we charge you, before the All-seeing and heart-searching God, and in the

name and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose eyes are as a flame of fire beholding all things, and in the presence of the elect angels who are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation, and who are, doubtless, spectators, though not of the heart, yet of the outward acts of our solemn assemblies, to take heed to yourself, to your doctrine, to your ministration in holy things, and to your conversation and whole conduct of life; studying to approve yourself, as much as in you lies, to God and to the consciences of all your beholders.

"Take heed to yourself." Look well to the state of your own soul. For that end, be much in self-examination, divine meditation and prayer, in the mortification of sin and indwelling corruption; watch and pray against temptation. Seek earnestly after Scripture evidences of a saving work of grace wrought in your soul. Be much in reading and pondering on the Holy Scriptures, "which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Shun vain and profane babblings, and foolish jestings; but exercise thyself rather unto godliness, which hath the promise both of this life and that which is to come." Beware of hypocrisy and formality in duty. "Keep thyself pure." And, as much as is possible in this imperfect state, labor to be always under the government of saving grace, both in heart and life.

Take special heed also to your doctrine. Labor to get your heart established in the truth *as it is in Jesus*, to be sound in the faith, in the doctrines of the gospel. Be much in your meditations on them, and pray fervently for the saving impressions and influences of them on your own soul and the souls of your hearers. Guard against errors and heresies, too much prevailing in this degenerate age and, we fear, in some of our churches that appear too manifestly to have departed from the truth. Let not the Arminian, Antinomian, or Enthusiastic schemes or pretensions with which many at this day are carried away and deluded find any place with you, remembering that "he that abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God; but he that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds. Hold fast the form of sound words, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus," that you may in some good degree be able to say with Paul, in the close of life, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Fight the good fight of faith against all opposition; in professing, preaching, and living up to the doctrines of Christ in the gospel and, in that way, lay hold of eternal life.

We charge you to take heed to your holy ministrations. "Feed the Church of God,"

which He has purchased with His own blood. Feed the whole flock of Christ over which the Holy Ghost now makes you overseer. Take the oversight of this church and people of God under your charge "not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." Preach the Word of God with plainness of speech; "be instant in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine. Let no man despise thee." Follow blessed Paul's example, namely, above all aim at preaching "Christ and Him crucified." Preach the doctrine of the sacred Trinity; the doctrine of the divine decrees, especially the doctrine of election; the doctrine of original sin, and the necessity of regeneration by the Spirit of God; the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and submission to it as absolutely necessary in order to our justification in the sight of God and hope of eternal life. Preach the doctrine of faith in the mediation of Christ; and, likewise, the doctrine of an evangelical and saving repentance as a turning from sin unto God in Christ. Preach the doctrine of the efficacy of grace in the saints' perseverance, even to glory.

Study these doctrines. Inculcate them on your hearers. Dwell much upon them, and this the rather as they are in this day of degeneracy called in question by many, and by some the most or all of them are absolutely, and with open boldness denied, who thereby seem to aim at the overthrow of the true apostolic faith and subversion of our holy religion. Preach the doctrine of good works as necessary duties in the Christian life; not as meritorious, but as the genuine products of the Spirit in the exercise of a gospel faith and repentance. Feed the flock under your care with the "sincere milk of the Word, that they may grow thereby" and be nourished under your ministry unto eternal life. Study to show yourself unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. Administer the holy sacraments of Christ's institution: baptism with water, to the proper subjects of it, and the Lord's Supper to visible believers of blameless lives.

Look well to the whole flock. Feed the sheep and also feed the lambs. Feed these not only by instructing them publicly with others in your ministry, but more privately, too, by catechizing them at stated seasons, teaching them the Assembly's Catechism, which is an excellent summary or compendium of gospel doctrines as well as precepts, and has been of singular use in the truly Reformed churches of Christ for ages past; though now exploded by some (from whom better principles might justly be expected), notwithstanding, it is so admirably adapted for the training up of our youth in the knowledge and fear of God, and an early acquaintance with the essentials of the Christian faith, therefore worthy to be highly esteemed and much improved, both by young and old. Labor also to keep up gospel discipline in the church with impartiality, not preferring one above another, in judging the

cases that come before you, bearing a just and faithful testimony against sin and every scandal with whomever it shall be found, approving yourself in all things a faithful steward of the manifold grace of God and a good minister of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, we charge you in the fear of God, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you take special heed to your conversation, and your whole conduct in life. See that it is according to the gospel of Christ. As in your doctrine, so in your manner of life show uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, soundness of speech, and a behavior that cannot be blamed. Be an example to the flock in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, and in purity. Be sober, be vigilant, apt to teach, given to hospitality, not covetous, not contentious, not revengeful, but readily forgiving wrongs. Aim at having this for your rejoicing, even the testimony of your conscience that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, you have your conversation in the world and, more especially, towards the people of your charge. In a word, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of a good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Recommend them both by your doctrine and by your practice.

To conclude, we now exhort and beseech you, as before God and our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge both the quick and the dead at His appearing and kingdom, keep this charge pure and unprofaned until death; remembering that the vows of God are upon you, in whose presence, and in the audience of this great assembly, you have witness a good confession.* Live up to it in the fear of God, that when Christ, the chief Shepherd and Head of His church shall appear in glory to judgment, you may hear that heart-cheering, soul-ravishing sentence of approbation pronounced on you, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, 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 well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever, Amen."

* The Reverend Mr. Taft's Confession of Faith was, by order of the council, read in council and also publicly previous to the charge, for a testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus, and to his belief of and adherence to those essential doctrines of the gospel and articles of the Christian faith professed in these New England churches, worthy of imitation in these perilous times,

in like cases, as one proper expedient to prevent the further spread of errors in the land and defection in our churches.

The Right Hand of Fellowship

by the Reverend Mr. James Bayley

It is of great importance that such as profess the same religion, and are invested with the same office, servants of the same God, teachers of the same truth, builders of the same spiritual house, partakers of the same Spirit, and fellow-laborers in the same vineyard should dwell together in unity. For when it is so, there is much beauty, strength, and blessing that accrues to their divine profession and employment; and God's people are much indebted to their kind and gracious Lord, the great Head of the church, for providing, qualifying, and sending forth spiritual men to join with and increase the number of brethren and fellow-laborers in His vineyard, whom, indeed, He commands to. For when it is so, there is much beauty, strength, and blessing that accrues to their divine profession and employment; and God's people are much indebted to their kind and gracious Lord, the great Head of the church, for providing, qualifying, and sending forth spiritual men to join with and increase the number of brethren and fellow-laborers in His vineyard, whom, indeed, He commands to live together in love, hereby showing themselves to be joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment to a good degree.

And when our Lord is pleased, according to the order of the gospel, to set apart a

servant of His to the work of the ministry, He requires a proper respect be paid him.

For this end, I suppose, it was that James, Cephas, and John gave the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas, hereby testifying their love to them as brethren, and as partakers with them in the same office and employment; and also their readiness, as the case might require, to assist them in promoting and advancing the redeemer's kingdom.

The same may be justly claimed by every true gospel minister who is set apart by the work by prayer and the laying on of hands by the Presbytery.

Wherefore, this business of giving the right hand on the present occasion, being assigned to me (though most unworthy) by the venerable council, convened at this time:

I do accordingly, reverend and dear sir, give you the right hand of fellowship, signifying hereby to you, and to all this assembly, that we look upon you as our brother and equal in office, a fellow-laborer with us in our Lord's vineyard; one on whom God has bestowed a measure of suitable qualifications for a gospel minister, and from whom we may expect comfort and help in the great work of the gospel ministry.

And now we solemnly profess it our duty and our resolution (as we have opportunity) to be your helpers, as brethren in the same sacred calling. And our prayer to God is that you may take heed to yourself, and to your doctrine, and to your whole ministry, to fulfill it; and that you may behave as Moses, who was faithful in all his house, who was exemplarily meek in his own cause, and zealous for the cause of his God, and far from slightly passing over any part of the charge committed to him.

And may you, in this arduous work, experience the quickening, strengthening, and refreshing virtue of all those gospel truths and ordinances with which Christ has entrusted you.

We commend you to the grace of God, who is able to keep you from falling; and to the Word of Grace which, as it has taught you (we trust) to choose the good part that shall not be taken from you, so it is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among those that are sanctified. Amen.

And now, I would turn to you, the fraternity of this church, and say, "The churches of Christ here present salute you as a part of Christ's flock, and wish you all spiritual blessings in and from Christ."

We rejoice that there is so much unity in your resettlement with a pastor who (we hope) will feed you with knowledge and understanding. We beseech you to esteem him highly in love for his work and office sake.

Let him have an interest in your prayers, that he may be instrumental in turning many to righteousness, especially among those over whom he has the pastoral charge.

Further, own and honor him in the due execution of his office. Do not say, "You take too much upon you," as they of old said to Moses.

We entreat you not to be wanting to his outward support, nor in any case where he may need your assistance. Live in love, and be at peace among yourselves, that the God of love and peace may dwell with you.

Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of one mind and heart, and live by faith that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost may be with you all.

AMEN