

A

LEGACY

TO

VACANT CONGREGATIONS.

BY R. H. BISHOP,
Of the Associate Reformed Church.

I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you—Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.

Jesus.

The popular opinions, that *any* sincere and orthodox preacher is competent to plant new Churches, and water such as have been lately planted, has done infinite mischief to the Christian cause.

Mason.

LEXINGTON:

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1804.

The Rev. Adam Rankin,

THE FOLLOWING

SERMON,

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY

INSCRIBED:

AS A SMALL MEMORIAL

OF THE

HIGHEST ESTEEM,

AND THE

SINCERE AFFECTION,

OF

THE AUTHOR.

NOTICE.

THE following Sermon was composed in March last for the particular use of the United Congregations of Shiloh and Mount Olivet. It was delivered to them the Sabbath after the author had made known to them, that the duty which he owed to some other parts of the Church did not allow him to accept their call. It is now printed, in the hopes that it may be blessed for cherishing the numerous vacancies in our connection, until the head of the Church shall see meet to provide for them fit pastors.

It may be necessary also to intimate, that the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Church, did, at their meeting in May last, adopt, and are now carrying into execution, the most vigorous measures for supplying all the Churches under their care, with able and useful Preachers. In their deliberations upon this subject, the infant societies on these Western waters did not escape their notice.

One Preacher more has been appointed to this department, and we have considerable hopes that he will soon be followed by several others.

We trust also, that the period is at no great distance, when we shall have a sufficiency within ourselves. We have at present one student of Divinity under trials for license, who, we hope, will soon make his appearance as a preacher; and in our Academy, at Lexington, we have several promising young men, whom, with the blessing of Heaven, a few year's care and instruction, shall make able ministers of the New Testament.

Having read this far, some may perhaps say:—"Ah! that's enough—the whole design of this publication, is, to make men *bigots*, and to form a party." Pray good friends don't be in a passion. Have patience, and hear

all our story. If by a *bigot* you understand a man who is well acquainted with all his religious principles, and who steadily adheres to them in every situation—we acknowledge the charge. It is the desire of our heart that all the adherents to our Church, and all the world were such bigots. But if by a *bigot* you understand a man who tenaciously adheres to any principle or practice; and can give no other reason for his conduct than that he *thinks so* or *feels so*, we deny the charge—For such *bigots* there is no quarter in our communion.

Again—if by *forming a party*, you understand “an endeavour to make men acquainted with the truth and the importance of the *whole* of the doctrines of revelation, and also the enforcing upon them the necessity of strictly adhering to these doctrines, not only as individuals, but also as bodies collective.” If this is the idea which you affix to the *forming a party*, we also acknowledge the charge. We just wish that our societies, as associated bodies, should in all their actions openly avow their attachment to that system of doctrine, worship, and government, which after mature deliberation, we are convinced, exhibits the truth as it is in Jesus. And as our societies are *voluntary* associations, we do not wish any person to attach himself to our body, (or if you will, party,) till he is as well convinced as ourselves. x But if, by *forming a party*, you understand the “collecting together a parcel of narrow contracted minds, and the teaching men, that the only or chief part of religion consists in illiberal “uncharitable reflections upon those who cannot in every point see as we see.” If this is the idea which you affix to the *forming a party*, we deny the charge. To form any such party as this our soul abhors. The sum of all our *bigotry* and all our party making is—that we are not ashamed openly to declare to the world what we believe, nor are we ashamed in any situation to act up to our profession. Our master has not taught us to say one thing, and think another. So far as any other bodies of Christians are, in our opinion, following Jesus, we from the heart wish them God speed—and we trust that we shall never be

backward to encourage and support them in every thing which, in conscience, we can acknowledge to be the common cause of the Redeemer; but at the same time we reckon it a duty which we owe to their Master and our Master, to them, to the world, and to our selves, candidly to lay open wherein we judge them to be defective, or corrupt. Having expressed our judgment respecting their doctrine and practice, we leave their persons and states to the decision of the great day. We never take it upon us to say that such and such persons *are* or *shall be damned*. We can readily acknowledge that there are *good men in other denominations*; but we know also, that were we following any of *these denominations*, or any of *these good men*, in every thing, which, as Churches, they maintain—we, for our part, would be sinning against our own light, and our own convictions, and consequently would *be very bad men*. These are the general principles of the Associate Reformed Church, respecting *bigotry* and *party making*. By these general principles the conduct of the majority of her members in both public and private life is regulated. There may be every here and there an individual or two which form an exception—we are not a perfect Church, nor do we pretend to have so much as *one perfect man* among us; but all the world will acknowledge that he must be either a very *weak* or a very *wicked* man who reproaches a whole body, for the faults or the failings of a few.

One word more and the advertisement is done. Let those Societies which profess to believe in the text illustrated in the following sermon, shew their faith by their works—firmly believing that the head of the Church, shall, in due time, give them a Pastor according to his heart, let them in the mean time be making some provision for a stated dispensation of gospel ordinances. Let that portion of the good things of this life, which they would now willingly bestow upon a stated ministry, be devoted to providing *convenient places of worship*. A great deal of hurry and embarrassment in a future day, might thus be prevented. Were Societies thus ready for a settlement, a settlement would be far

easier obtained. People who cannot in the first instance do a good turn to themselves, cannot be trusted much to do a good turn to others. Did not *tyrant* custom establish a contrary practice in this country, a moment's reflection might convince any rational being, that it is preposterous to expect a stated ministry, till the congregation have a place provided in which they can comfortably assemble in all seasons, and in all kinds of weather.

LEXINGTON, *August*, 1804.

A LEGACY, &c. &c.

Jer. iii. 15. And I will give you Pastors according to mine heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

A STANDING ministry is one of the greatest blessings which ever God bestowed upon man. This institution is the appointed mean whereby men are delivered from every evil, and are made partakers of every good. By the use of this institution, men are brought from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

This remark is fully confirmed by our text, as it stands connected with the three preceding verses. Israel, the representative of God's Church in every age, is therein held forth unto us as in a distressing, deplorable situation. They are represented as *back-sliders*, and as men who had been unfaithful in the most sacred bond. *Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, return thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord, for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.—Merciful words! Gracious declaration! But how are they to be kept, when they are again brought back to Zion? Are they not bent upon backsliding, and shall they not again go astray? Yes verily. Were they to be just left to themselves, they would soon be as miserable as ever. But against this evil Jehovah*

himself in the text gives them security. *And, "says he" I will give you Pastors, &c. &c.*

You shall not even in Zion be left to wander in ways of your own devising, but you shall have Pastors to watch over you. These Pastors shall be every way well qualified for their offices, for they shall be men of my choosing *according to my heart*. Under the care of these Pastors you shall not be disappointed, *for they shall feed you with knowledge and understanding*.

What was the situation of ancient Israel, is the natural situation of men in every age. They are a seed of evil doers—children who are corrupters—going astray, speaking lies with their hearts and their mouths full of rebellion. Together with these wanderers, Jehovah has authorized his servants to go into all the world, and proclaim *return ye backsliding children, I will heal your backsliding and love you freely*. Through the use of this gracious declaration, men are, in ordinary cases, brought within the pale of the visible Church. Their hearts are constrained by love to yield a ready obedience to all God's commandments. It is not, however, enough that men be once reclaimed, they must be carefully watched; they must have daily new nourishment. He, therefore, blesses them with the use of a standing ministry—He, as it is expressed in the text, *gives to them Pastors according to his heart, who shall feed them with knowledge and understanding*.

Thus applying these words to the situation of the Church in every age, we shall, in the sequel of the discourse—

I. Describe the character and the office of Gospel Ministers—They are described in the text as men *according to God's heart*, and as men *who shall feed the Church with knowledge and understanding*.

II. Consider the agency which Jehovah has in blessing the Church with ministers of this description—*I will give you Pastors and,*

III. Conclude with some remarks upon the use which Churches ought to make of the doctrine of the text.

Gospel ministers are in the text styled *Pastors* or

Shepherds. The name describes at once the duty of the minister, and the disposition of the people. It is the duty of a pastor to watch over the flock—to defend them from those who would destroy them, and to lead them about to convenient and nourishing pastures. It is the duty of the flock to be of a gentle, easy, teachable disposition—to be harmless, and at the same time useful.

The pastors who are promised to the Church in the text, are said to be in the first place, *men according to God's heart*—that is, *men of God's choosing*—*men of God's forming*.

The same sovereign grace which passed by sinning Angels, and fixed upon the human race, makes a distinction among the sons of men. He who is the former of our bodies, and the Father of our spirits selects one man for one thing and another man for another. *Before I formed thee in the belly,* (says Jehovah, speaking to the prophet Jeremiah,) *Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet to the nations.* Go thy way (said the Lord to Ananias, concerning Saul of Tarsus,) *Go thy way, &c.* Acts ix. 15 and 16. Why one man is thus in the purpose of Heaven, designed to the honorable office of an ambassador for Christ, and others by nature equally worthy, and equally well qualified left, we cannot tell. We resolve all into sovereign good pleasure—*even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.* *Had not the potter power over the clay, to make of the same lump one vessel unto honor, and another unto dish nor?* If any charitable ears are offended at these harsh expressions, our reply is, *we repeat scripture.*

Jehovah, who does all things according to the counsel of his own will, having thus marked out those who are to carry his message to the human race, he, in the use of ordinary means, gradually fits them for their important trust. He in a day of power makes them feel the force of truth upon their own hearts—He discovers to them the great wickedness of their heart and life.—*Alas! Lord God* (says Jeremiah,) *I cannot speak, for I am a child.*

Woe is me (says Isaiah,) *for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips.* Thus convinced of their weakness thus convinced of their unworthiness, they are sweetly and irresistibly drawn to place all their confidence in the fulness of the new covenant. They remember *that God hath chosen the foolish, &c. &c.* 1 Cor. i. 27 and 28.— Their only boasting, then, is in Christ Jesus, who, of God, is made to them *wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption.*

Thus renewed in the spirit of their minds—with their heart thus formed according to God's heart, these men manifest the reality of their change, by a life of faith upon the Son of God, by a conversation becoming the Gospel. They renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by a manifestation of the truth, they commend themselves to every man's conscience, in the sight of God. They can appeal to Heaven—they can call God and men to witness, how holily, and justly, and unblameably they behave themselves, among those who believe. In all their actions, civil and religious, they follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them who call upon the Lord with a pure heart. In both public and private life, they abound in every grace which can adorn humanity, and recommend religion. Thus much for the first part of the character of these Pastors—they are men *according to God's heart.*

These Pastors are in the next place, described as men, *who shall feed the Church with knowledge and understanding.* This phrase intimates two things—that these men shall be men of a considerable extent of knowledge themselves, and they that shall have the faculty of communicating that knowledge, at such seasons, and in such a manner, as shall be for general edification.

1. The phrase under consideration, intimates "that these Pastors shall be men of a considerable extent of knowledge themselves."

The Priest's lips *should keep knowledge,* and the people *should ask the law at his mouth.* But how shall a Priest's lips keep that which he has never got? How shall the

people with any satisfaction, ask the law at the mouth of a man, as ignorant as themselves? An ignorant, illiterate Priesthood, is one of the greatest curses which has ever befallen the Christian Church. When the blind lead the blind, what can be expected but that both shall fall into the ditch?

It is, indeed, a very popular doctrine among some classes of Christians, that a man is sufficiently qualified to preach the Gospel, though he has no more knowledge than what they comprehend under the phrase "experimentally knowing the truth, or experimentally feeling the power of religion." This, however, is a grand mistake, as held by some classes of professed Christians, it is nothing else than a *doctrine of devils*. It is in the first place, very hard to say how little knowledge is consistent with a state of grace; or to speak in their own stile, how little knowledge is comprehended under experimentally feeling, or knowing the power of religion. Babes and sucklings, idiots, and the deaf and the dumb, may, by the power of grace, be conformed to God's image; but no man in his senses will say, that any of these are qualified for being Gospel ministers. We also daily meet with men who are arrived at the years of maturity, and who have all their bodily organs in perfection; and of the reality of whose grace we cannot have the smallest doubt—who, nevertheless, on account of some neglect in the cultivation of their minds while young, or on account of some innate weakness in their mental powers, have, in fact, very little knowledge of either one kind or another. Are men of this description, however pious, or however well disposed, qualified for feeding the Church with knowledge and understanding? Are men, who scarcely understand the common rules of arithmetic, and who can scarcely speak two sentences without offering violence to their mother tongue? Are men, thus ignorant, and thus stupid, qualified for being preachers of the Gospel? Common sense shudders at the thought. They may be good Christians, but, in the nature of things, they cannot be good preachers.

But again. A man who is a pastor according to God's heart, is set up *for the defence of the Gospel*. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary, that he be thoroughly acquainted with all which that Gospel contains. He must have a general and particular knowledge of all the doctrines of revelation. He must know exactly the mutual dependence and connection which exist betwixt each of these doctrines. He must know by what authority they are received—the particular use for which every one of them is designed, and the best manner in which they may be illustrated and defended. Nor is it enough that he be merely acquainted with what is *truth*. In order that he may be able to defend this truth, he must also be well acquainted with what is *error*. He must have a general knowledge of the various heresies, which have at different times, and in different places, pestered the church of Christ. He must be capable of detecting error in whatever form it makes its appearance. He must, by a knowledge of their wiles and subterfuges, be able to oppose the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive, who privily bring in damnable heresies. Nor is it sufficient that he be well acquainted with all which are usually called religious matters. If he would be a successful preacher he must also know the *WORLD*. That he may be qualified for exhibiting the doctrines of the Gospel to advantage, he must be considerably well acquainted with the characters of those to whom they are to be held forth. He must have a general acquaintance with men and manners. He must know the various windings of the human heart. He must know something of the nature and force of those passions by which men are actuated. He must know what, in the ordinary course of things, strengthens or curbs this or the other particular vice.

With such a fund of knowledge, the preacher shall be prepared for every emergency. His quiver shall be always full of arrows. He shall daily bring forth out of his treasures, things new and old. His lips shall keep knowledge, not as a vessel which may soon be empty.

but as a living spring, which has always plenty, and to spare.

2. The phrase in the text intimates, that the Pastors whom God shall bestow upon the Church, shall be men who shall have the *faculty of communicating what knowledge they have, at such seasons and in such manner as shall be for general edification.*

It is not every one who has a sufficient stock of knowledge who is qualified for preaching the Gospel. A man may have a great deal of knowledge, and yet be otherwise so formed, by nature or habit, as to be but a very useless character. The world is nothing the better of a gold mine while it lies concealed in the bowels of the earth. He is only an unprofitable steward who brings forth nothing but gold and silver, and costly apparel, when the family are set to table and are expecting meat and drink. Equally unprofitable is that pastor who keeps what knowledge he has within his own heart—or who brings it forward at unseasonable hours, or in a manner which is not calculated to edify. The pastor described in the text is one who shall *feed the people.* Agreeable to the Apostle's description such a one must be *apt to teach.* A variety of talents then, both natural and acquired are absolutely necessary to constitute a fit preacher of the Gospel. Our God never sent a message with any one to whom he did not previously give the faculty of delivering it. Once a dumb ass reproved the madness of a prophet, but the same power which invested the ass with the authority of a reprovee, also endowed him with human voice. The Apostles were commanded not to depart from Jerusalem till they received *power* to be witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. The descent of the Holy Ghost in the day of Pentecost shewed, that one leading feature of that power which they received, was the *faculty of communicating* the truths of the Gospel in an intelligible and impressive manner. The inference which we ought to draw from these facts, is plain. To constitute a preacher there must be an easy, agreeable, social dispo-

sition. There must be a readiness and fluency of expression. There must be a dignity and majesty of countenance. A workman without hands or arms—a footman without feet or legs, are not greater solecisms than a preacher without more or less of oratorical powers.

Next to having a natural faculty for communicating knowledge, a preacher must have that wisdom, that prudence which discern both time and judgment. He must be wise as a serpent and know at what seasons such and such truths will be beautiful and useful.—Those truths which would be extremely proper and useful, were they delivered at one time, would be highly improper, and in many cases very hurtful were they delivered at another. Our Lord himself, who had the tongue of the learned, and who spake as never man spake; communicated instruction to his disciples only as they were able to bear it. The Apostle administered milk for babes, and strong meat for those who were of full age. He charges his son Timothy to study to shew himself a workman who needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. A word spoken in due season, how good is it! Nor is the time or season the only thing which requires sagacity. Much of the effect of an exhortation or reproof depends upon the manner in which it is communicated. A preacher may deliver to an audience a great deal of truth, and a great deal of truth very suitable to their particular situation, and yet by not attending to some little circumstances, only beat the air. The great Apostle of the Gentiles was crafty, and caught men with guile. He became all things to all men. To imitate his example in this, no certain rule can be given—A preacher must, in this case, just act as prudence and former experience suggest. The tempers, passions, and dispositions of men, are as various as their faces. To communicate instruction so as to suit every one of these, requires an art something more than human. The words of those who have this art are as apples of gold in pictures of silver. *And, moreover, because the Preach-*

He was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one Shepherd. Eccl. xii. 9—11.

Thus we have shortly delineated the character, and the office of those Pastors which in the text are promised to the Church. *They are men according to God's heart and they are men who shall feed the Church with knowledge and understanding.* It follows that we now,

II. Consider the agency of Jehovah in bestowing this inestimable blessing, **I WILL GIVE you Pastors.**

The care of Jehovah is over all his works, for his Kingdom ruleth over all. His providential care, is, however, exercised in a peculiar manner over his Church. *I, the Lord, (says he) do keep it, I will water it every moment, lest any should hurt it; I will keep it night and day.* The canon of the Scripture being now completed, he does not by any extraordinary revelation, raise up Pastors as he did in the days of Jeremiah and Paul, but his working in this matter, is still as real and as efficacious as ever. He still continues *by an agency peculiar to himself, to give his Church Pastors according to his heart, who shall feed men with knowledge and understanding.* Three particulars shall sufficiently explain all which is necessary to be said on this part of the subject:

1. God, in a manner peculiar to himself, disposes such and such persons to devote themselves to his service, in the Gospel of his Son.

Remarkable is the wisdom which is displayed in God's moral government of the world. All are not inclined to follow one profession. Almost every individual of the human race, is from his earliest years, by something of a natural instinct, disposed to follow one thing in preference to another. This wisdom is in a peculiar, a very remarkable manner displayed, in God's raising up pastors for the Church. The history of the

Church abounds with instances of those who were afterwards distinguished in the Gospel, being in early life, by some unaccountable impulse, disposed to devote themselves to the work of the ministry; and this too, in direct opposition to the general wish of all their friends, and to all the flattering prospects of advancement and aggrandizement in the world. When it pleased God to reveal his Son in them, immediately they conferred not with flesh and blood. Ease, prosperity and the most flattering prospects in any other line of life, could afford them no satisfaction. If, for a moment, they endeavoured to give over the romantic thought and seek employment in any other which could be easier attained, immediately peace and happiness forsook them. A certain kind of uneasiness of which they could give no account, filled their mind. Thus harassed by vexatious thoughts on one hand, and sweetly drawn by the cords of love on the other, they have at last devoted in the most solemn manner all their time, and all their talents, and their whole life to the study of divine things. They have thus thrown up all and followed Jesus, firmly believing that in due time, he would remove every difficulty, and use them as polished shafts in his quiver.

2. The same wise God, in the ordinary course of his providence, so arranges circumstances, that those persons who have thus, through grace, devoted themselves to his service, are, in due time, fully prepared for entering upon that great work. It is remarkable how the arm of the Lord has been revealed in cases innumerable, in this stage. In this stage, worm Jacob has threshed the mountains. Jehovah has made waste mountains and hills, and dried up all their herbs. He has made rivers islands, and dried up the pools. Youths who have devoted themselves to the study of divine things, in the most unfavourable circumstances, have in a thousand instances been provided for, supported, and carried through in a manner no-body knows how.—The abject poverty of parents who were well disposed—the steady and inveterate opposition of other parents, who were in good enough circumstances—the being raised in

places almost destitute of the means of improvement ; all these things and a thousand other such things have stood in the way, and through all they have passed. The governor of the nations only said the word, and friends were raised up where they were little expected. He who has all at his disposal only gave the commission, and every thing which was necessary, was provided. Our God is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working. He brings order out of confusion, and light out of darkness. We observe,

3. That the God who has all along watched over those chosen ones ; at last brings them forth into the world, and fixes them in a sphere of extensive usefulness. Not one good thing shall fail of all which hath been promised. The holy resolutions which were of his inspiring are not to be lost. The talents, natural and acquired, which he hath bestowed, are not to lie hid in a napkin. Infinite wisdom shall in the ordinary course of his providence, actually give unto the Church those pastors which he hath for years been preparing. He chuses out for us the lot of our inheritance. He knows exactly what disposition, and what talents will suit this or the other part of the church. He marks out for us the bounds of our habitation. Opposite interests, opposite inclinations, opposite resolutions and workings, are all made to harmonise in forming the most important social relation upon earth. Men frequently think one way. God in his providence orders another. He hath the hearts of men, both saints and sinners at his command. He hath all circumstances under his controul. He holds the reins of government in his hand, and he disposes of individuals, and of collective bodies, as seemeth good. The issue, however gloomy the beginning, shews itself to be the arrangement of infinite wisdom. That, and that only hath happened, which, under all circumstances, would have been for the good of all concerned. This also cometh forth from the Lord of Hosts, who is wonderful in council, and whose ways are past finding out.

Thus, brethren, we have shortly delineated to you,

the character and the office of gospel ministers, and have also set before you the peculiar agency which Jehovah hath in bestowing such ministers upon the Church. As the God of providence, he makes all things subservient to his work of grace. He disposes the minds of particular men. He makes bare his arm and removes difficulties. He arranges a great many little circumstances, so that in the end, those men are actually given to the Church—fixed in spheres of extensive usefulness. In all those different stages of working, there are a great variety of circumstances connected, and disjoined and over-ruled, so that all are made to harmonize in promoting one end. He who knows the end from the beginning, thus arranges, and thus works. He is thus gradually preparing, and gradually sending forth, and gradually fixing in his Church, pastors according to his heart, who shall feed his people with knowledge and understanding—O the exceeding riches of his grace! O the tender care of the chief Shepherd of souls!

It only remains that we now conclude with some remarks upon the improvement which Churches ought to make of the doctrine contained in the text—
And,

1. The doctrine which we have now considered, teaches us where Churches ought to apply for a daily supply of Gospel Ministers—Why it is to him who hath all power in Heaven and in earth; to him who hath received gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that God the Lord may dwell among them; to him who gives unto some, Apostles, and to some, Prophets, and to some, Evangelists, and to some, Pastors and Teachers.

The other ordinary outward means are indeed to be used, but the *first step* to be taken in obtaining a Gospel minister, is to ask him from the head of the Church. Till this is done, we cannot expect but that God will blast all other means; or if we really are successful in obtaining the object of our wish, it shall be given as a *curse* instead of a *blessing*. It shall be bestowed as God bestowed a King upon Israel in the days of old: Given in his anger, and taken away in his wrath.

Consider, brethren, the free access which you have at all times to the throne of grace. His ear is always open. He is daily saying, ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God. Let us then, in this case, and in every other case, come with *boldness* with *frequency* and *zeal* to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in every time of need.

Consider in the next place, the great importance of that blessing of which you stand in need. You want one who is to break the bread of life to you—It is one who is to be in God's stead. Who is, as it were, to stand betwixt you and Heaven—who is to watch over your souls—who is, under God, to have the charge of your most important, your eternal interests. Surely a thing upon which your happiness or misery so much depends, is worthy of being made the matter of *frequent* and *zealous* prayer.

Consider again, the peculiar encouragement which you have, to make this particular request. This is a thing of which Jehovah loves to be put in remembrance. The bestowing of pastors upon his Church, is one of those things, to which every other dispensation of his providence is made subservient. Repeat the promise in the text again and again. Use in this matter holy boldness—Urge that promise which the departing Saviour gave to his disciples—that the spirit in his influence should descend and bless the Church always with a standing ministry. Take with you words, and say unto him “truly O Lord, Christ has died in vain—all which hath been done for the salvation of sinners, is in vain, if there are not men raised up to proclaim the glad news.”

In fine—consider, in this case, the peculiar sweetness there is in the enjoyment of a thing which is obtained as a return of prayer. Prayer, brethren, is not only the appointed mean for bringing unto us this or the other enjoyment, but it also, in bringing the thing requested, brings along with it a peculiar kind of sweetness.—When we are in the habit of acknowledging the Lord in

every step which we take in seeking after, or obtaining this or the other blessing, we are in a condition for observing a great many signal interpositions of Providence, which otherwise would have passed unnoticed. Esau's face when seen, as a return of prayer, is beautiful as an Angel of God.

If then Churches would really have gospel ministers as a blessing—If they would as Christians, use the privilege which they have, at a throne of grace. If they would wish to be duly impressed with the importance of this blessing—If they would talk with God upon a subject in which he delights—If in the end they would obtain their object and a peculiar sweetness along with it—If they would have all these things, in this manner, let them on such occasions abound in the exercise of lively, importunate prayer.

2. The subject which we have considered, teaches Churches how they ought to proceed in chusing, or looking out for a pastor. The text tells us, that the pastors of God's sending, are men *according to his own heart, and men who are capable of feeding people with knowledge and understanding.* Well, then, Churches ought never to consider a man as sent them by God, unless he comes up in some measure to this character—Christians are not to imagine that every one who is dignified with the name of a preacher, acts by virtue of a commission from Heaven—Nor are they to imagine that every preacher whom they may see or hear, is one who will suit them. There are quacks in divinity as well as in medicine—Beloved, believe not every Spirit, *but try the Spirits.* He who acts as an ambassador for Christ, has upon him an holy anointing, which carries conviction to every one who hath his senses exercised to discern betwixt good and evil.

That Churches may know when a man is sent them of God, their attending to the advice of the town clerk of Ephesus, would be exceeding proper. It was this man's advice to do nothing *rashly*—And by not attending to this good salutary advice, many evils in collective bodies are to be attributed. In the government

and discipline of our Church, it belongs to Church courts *alone*, to say what man is fit to preach the gospel—and in using this their right, our courts proceed with the greatest caution. They lay hands *suddenly* upon no man. But the pronouncing a man fit to preach the gospel, and the pronouncing a man fit for such a particular charge, are two distinct things, and things which ought in no case to be confounded. The former belongs *exclusively* to our courts, the latter is the *sacred right* of the people at large. Whenever, then people resolve to call the very first man they may hear, or to call any man, till they are pretty well acquainted with all about him, they tamely give up their rights, and lay a foundation for very great abuses. There is a great deal more to be known about a preacher, than how he acquits himself in the pulpit. Those talents and those dispositions which would suit one place exceedingly well, would be extremely hurtful in another. It is only a man among a thousand who has the happy art of suiting himself so as to be eminently useful in every place. If people then, would have a man to suit them, so as to feed them with knowledge and understanding, they must allow themselves *time*. In patience they must possess their souls—Prudence and Christian sagacity must be exercised.

Next to the being rash in fixing upon an object, it is dangerous for a *minority*, or even a considerable *majority* in a society, to insist upon a settlement, in opposition to the judgment of the rest of the members. It is in vain, brethren, to expect any thing, and far more vain to expect a thing of such importance as a gospel ministry, till God's time. It is only in the way of our duty that we can expect to be happy, either as individuals, or as a body. It is the statute law of the king of the Church, that pastors shall be chosen by the open vote of the people at large. As long, then, as the head of the Church has not given to the people *one mind*, we reasonably conclude that it is not his time to bestow upon that people *a pastor*. We have already in the doctrinal part of this discourse, seen how the God of Pro-

vidence makes opposite interests, and opposite inclinations harmonise in forming the pastoral relations. Let us then just believe the doctrine, and rest assured that in every case our duty shall be made clear to us in the use of ordinary means. Time may be long in our account, but let us remember, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Yet a very little, little while and he who is to come shall come, and will not tarry. In the mean time let us glorify our God, by the exercise of the noble, heart-cheering graces of patience, resignation, and fortitude. In the most desolate situation, it is just enough for a believer to know, that he is exactly in that situation, which infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness pronounce best.

Lastly. The doctrine which we have considered, presents a sure ground of confidence to the Church in every situation. Why, brethren, the faithfulness of Jehovah—the faithfulness of him who cannot lie, is here pledged to secure unto the Church a regular succession of useful pastors. God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. He has been fulfilling the promise in the text for upwards of two thousand years. In this promise our fathers, and brethren in different ages, and in different parts of the world have trusted, and in trusting they were not put to shame. They found him faithful who had promised. The author of the promise continues still the unchangeable God—He is at this very day and hour manifesting himself to be faithful. He is in the various parts of the world raising, and sending forth, and fixing in his Church workmen who need not be ashamed—workmen who rightly divide the word of truth and give every man his portion. Let us then, dearly beloved, be partakers of the same faith, and shew ourselves heirs to the same promise—Rest assured that the head of the Church knows, and is providing for your every situation. Say, brethren, who it was, who eight or ten years ago first formed in you the resolution of associating together in a Church capacity—Say, breth-

ren, who it was, who has hitherto watched over you in your days of weakness and sorrow—Was it not Jehovah Jesus the shepherd, and the bishop of your souls? And can you suppose that the same wisdom which first formed you—the same goodness which hath hitherto cherished you, did not at as early a period begin to provide for you a pastor! Have you any reason to believe that he hath dealt worse with you than with other Churches? No, brethren, our Lord is not slack to his promise as some men count slackness—The most distant parts of the universe shall meet before *one Church* of God's planting shall perish for want of a pastor. The revolutions of Europe shall waft the messengers of peace to the freemen of Columbia—The Tay and the Tweed shall extend their streams, and shall water the banks of the Ohio and Cumberland. Let us, then, lay up the words of the text deep in our hearts—Let us make them frequently the subject of our meditation—our song in the house of our pilgrimage—and so in due time we shall find that not one good thing hath failed of all that the Lord hath spoken.

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified—
Amen.

F I N I S.