

# In Pursuit of an Owenian Pastoral Theology: An Examination of John Owen's Ordination Sermons

By Angelo O. Valle

## INTRODUCTION

On the day before his death, John Owen wrote a most pastoral note to his long-standing friend Charles Fleetwood,

I am going to him whom my soul hath loved, or rather who hath loved me with an everlasting love; which is the whole ground of all my consolation.... I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm, but whilst the great Pilot is in it the loss of a poore under-rower will be inconsiderable. Live and pray and hope and doe not despair; the promise stands invincible that he will never leave thee nor forsake thee.<sup>1</sup>

Even in the final moments of Owen's life, he was committed to caring for the flock of Christ. He encouraged Charles Fleetwood to consider God's everlasting love and promises, which in Owen's eyes were an "invincible" foundation to the believer. Owen as a pastor was not lifting up an empty truth, but one that he had experientially clung to throughout his extensive pastoral career; namely, God's abiding presence in the midst of uncertainty. Owen understood this reality quite well. The latter course of his life consisted of layers of political and theological defeat, yet his eyes remained fixed upon the faithfulness and abiding presence of God His shepherd.<sup>2</sup> Owen's pastoral trajectory for guiding his congregation was rooted in the very pastures which he had travailed with Christ His shepherd.

But what sort of pastor was he? Owen was always a pastor of the puritan tradition. A succinct definition for puritanism is provided by John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim. "Puritanism was a variety of Reformed Protestantism, aligned with the continental Calvinistic churches rather than with Lutherans ... which originated within the Church of England, and was a product

of that unique environment and its tensions."<sup>3</sup> Another angle in considering the definition of a puritan comes from one of the 20th century's most vocal supporters for the puritan movement, J. I. Packer. Packer provides an alternative definition, "Puritanism was an evangelical holiness movement seeking to implement its vision of spiritual renewal, national and personal, in the church, the state, and the home; in education, evangelism, and economics; in individual discipleship and devotion, and in pastoral care and competence."<sup>4</sup> The

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1. Peter Toon, *Correspondence of John Owen* (Lutterworth: James Clarke, 1970), 174.

2. For a purposeful examination of the life of John Owen from the vantage point of "defeat," see Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

3. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Introduction, p. 2.

4. J. I. Packer, *An Anglican to Remember—William Perkins: Puritan Popularizer* (London: St. Antholin's Lectureship Charity, 1996), 1–2. See also Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 82n1; Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 2–5; Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), xiii–xix; Richard Greaves, "The Nature of the Puritan Tradition," in *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Nuttall*, ed. R. Buick Knox (London: Epworth Press, 1977), 255–273; Basil Hall, "Puritanism: The Problem of Definition," in *Studies in Church History*, ed. G. J. Cumming (London: Nelson, 1965), 2:283–296; Richard Mitchell Hawkes, "The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 247, accessed August 8, 2019, ATLA Religion Database

puritans recognized their unique theological mission as affecting every sphere of the world at large, from the kitchen table to the king's crown. All were called to bend the knee to the authority of Christ Himself who was clearly proclaimed from the pulpit sabbath by sabbath.

In addition to bearing the badge of puritanism proudly, Owen also saw himself as a pastor in the Protestant Scholastic tradition. Owen functioned primarily during the middle era of Protestant Scholasticism which has been called High Orthodoxy (A.D. 1640–1724).<sup>5</sup> During this period, the intellectual heirs of the magisterial Reformers, and their subsequent confessional and creedal documents, were able to solidify and advance the faithful deposit that had been handed down to them.<sup>6</sup> However, scholasticism cannot be misunderstood as bearing any content inherently within itself. Scholasticism must be viewed primarily as methodological. Richard Muller writes, “[Scholasticism was] a method of discourse used in the schools and universities, applicable to nearly all disciplines . . . as a method, scholasticism evidences an institutionalization of Protestant thought in its academies and universities, not the rise of a specific doctrinal perspective.”<sup>7</sup> Owen's historical moment paired with his own university education and role at Oxford lent itself to his natural utilization of this common method.

with ATLASerials; Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1964), 13–29. Hill provides useful historical survey of the development of the term “puritan” as it began as a “very general term of abuse.” Ibid., 14.; D. M. Lloyd-Jones, “Puritanism and Its Origins,” in *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 237–59; John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education, 1560–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 9–22; Tae-Hyeun Park, *The Sacred Rhetoric of the Holy Spirit: A Study of Puritan Preaching in Pneumatological Perspective* (Apeldoorn: Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, 2005), 73–75; L. J. Trinterud, “The Origins of Puritanism,” *Church History* 20 (1951): 37–57, accessed August 8, 2019, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. The present author is indebted to Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 113, for identifying various resources and trajectories in the elusive and complex history of defining puritanism.

5. Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology, ed. David C. Steinmetz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4–7.

6. See also Willem J. Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Jay T. Collier, trans. Albert Gootjes, *Reformed Historical-Theological Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Glasgow: Paternoster Press, 1999); *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001); Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated*

With a broad awareness then of these contextual features, Owen's pastoral theology would come to bear fruit that reflected both its world-encompassing dynamic (via his puritanism) and rigorous precision in polemics and application (via his Protestant Scholasticism). Owen's own desire was not to simply pastor the flock of a particular congregation, but through his own giftedness in writing, which has survived in his voluminous remains, one finds that he sought to pastor the state, his fellow under-shepherds, correct his theological foes, and of course the people of God at large.

Amongst the entirety of the collected writings of John Owen there are only three ordination sermons preserved for the church. All three sermons may be found in volume 9 of *The Works of John Owen* as edited by William H. Goold.<sup>8</sup> As posthumous sermons, they were preserved by a member of John Owen's church, Sir John Hartopp. The aim of this article is twofold: first, highlight the trustworthiness of the unauthorized scribe, Sir John Hartopp, Baronet; second, to identify Owen's pastoral theology as he expressed it to clergy and laity alike via the pulpit. Stephen Wright's article on “Sir John Hartopp, third baronet” provides the foundation for much of the historical research gathered below. Wright's own concise entry on the life of Hartopp marked out much of the primary research trajectories that are subsequently gathered here.<sup>9</sup>

*Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology, ed. David C. Steinmetz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

7. Muller, *After Calvin*, 4. For subsequent articulation of the primacy of Scholasticism as chiefly concerned with method see Muller, *After Calvin*, 27–33, 74–88; Richard A. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 189–204; Luco J. van den Brom, “Scholasticism and Contemporary Systematic Theology” in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 279, 282–283, 287. For the import of Aristotelian influence on the Protestant Scholastics see Richard A. Muller, “Reformation, orthodoxy, ‘Christian Aristotelianism,’ and the eclecticism of early modern philosophy,” *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis*, 81, no. 3 (2001): 306–322, accessed September 9, 2017, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials. Crawford Gribben does witness a change in Owen's stance towards the scholastic method, of both the Roman Catholic and Protestant sort, when he writes, “[For Owen the s]cholastic method was to be abominated wherever it was found.” Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 219.

8. *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (1850–1853; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965–2008).

9. Stephen Wright, “Sir John Hartopp, third baronet,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed February 14, 2020, <https://www.oxforddnb.com>.

HISTORICAL SOURCE CONSIDERED:  
SIR JOHN HARTOPP

In order to verify the credibility of the sermons that will be examined, one must know something about the man who transcribed them: Sir John Hartopp. Hartopp was a Nonconformist, “a thrice elected Member of Parliament for Leicestershire,” and member of Owen’s congregation at Leadenhall Street.<sup>10</sup> He was an educated Christian who was nestled firmly within the Nonconformist context and cohorts of his pastor, John Owen. After being widowed in 1658, Sir John Hartopp’s mother, Mary, would go on to wed one of Owen’s closest friends, Charles Fleetwood in 1664. Fleetwood was the former General and son-in-law of Oliver Cromwell. Hartopp’s mother would move to Stoke Newington, Middlesex where Fleetwood lived. In the late autumn of 1666, Sir John Hartopp would go on to marry Fleetwood’s daughter, Elizabeth, who was from Fleetwood’s first marriage to Bridget Cromwell. Hartopp was a committed Nonconformist who had followed in his pastor’s footsteps in his willingness to stand against the Established church. In one instance Hartopp along with Fleetwood, came under the eye of the church wardens of their parish in Stoke Newington for failing to come for worship and partaking of the Lord’s Supper in 1673.<sup>11</sup>

Hartopp would continue in the Leadenhall Street congregation under Owen’s successors including Isaac Watts. In a funeral discourse dedicated to Sir John Hartopp and his wife, Watts shed some light on the man, “When I name Sir John Hartopp, all that knew him will agree that I name a gentleman, a scholar, and a Christian....”<sup>12</sup> Watts continued in his exposition of Hartopp’s character, “He had a taste for universal learning; and ingenious arts were his delight from his youth. He pursued knowledge in various forms, and was acquainted with many parts of human science....”<sup>13</sup> Watts would even go on to use the word “genius” to describe Hartopp. Though a funeral sermon is an excellent opportunity to euphemistically recall the life of an individual, it would seem from his life and character that Hartopp was an educated, capable Christian who had served in public life, and maintained exemplary character in the church. Hartopp’s commitment with Christ led him to even pursue studying the Hebrew language after fifty years of age.<sup>14</sup>

Sir John Hartopp was not only a member of pastor John Owen’s church, but he was also a close friend. Their friendship is evidenced in various correspondences.<sup>15</sup> One example provides a window into Owen’s own defeated mentality at this latter stage of his

life while simultaneously reflecting on his friendship towards Hartopp and his wife. Owen wrote, “Dear Sir, The reason why I write so seldom unto any of my friends is because I have nothing to write; at least nothing that is worth reading in my scribbling ... my letters are not worth reading for nothing.”<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Owen continued to expand upon his love for the Hartopp family, “And as for you I am sure I have noe need to tender you any new assurance of my cordiall respects and love unto your selfe and your Lady.”<sup>17</sup> In a subsequent letter Owen refers to Hartopp as “my deare friend....”<sup>18</sup> In addition, Owen’s pastoral letters also sought to comfort the Hartopp’s by reminding them of his regular ministry of prayer on their behalf. Isaac Watts, highlighted their friendship in his funeral discourse for Hartopp. Watts wrote, “He [that is Hartopp] enjoyed an intimate friendship with that great and venerable man Dr Owen, and this was mutually cultivated with zeal and delight on both sides, till death divided them.”<sup>19</sup>

In short, though his sermons remain unofficial copies of Owen’s writings, Hartopp’s character, his friendship with Owen, and his own education grant allowance for their overall trustworthy character. Hartopp would only live to see one collection of sermons published in his lifetime. In 1721, the year before Hartopp’s death, a collection of Owen’s discourses and sermons were published in a single folio, which included unpublished notes from Owen as well as those from Hartopp’s shorthand notes.<sup>20</sup> According to Goold, the 1721 edition was “edited so carefully by five Independent ministers, who assure us that the posthumous sermons contained in it were the genuine productions of Owen....”<sup>21</sup> Hartopp’s regular practice was to take shorthand notes of Owen’s sermons and then to share them with his

10. Goold, “Prefatory Note,” in John Owen, 9:18.

11. J. T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry Besieged, 1650–1700* (London: Routledge, 1993), 84, quoted in Stephen Wright, “Sir John Hartopp, third baronet,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

12. Isaac Watts, *Death and Heaven: or, The last Enemy conquered, and Separate Spirits made Perfect. With an Account of the rich variety of their Employments and Pleasures. Attempted in Two Funeral Discourses. In Memory of Sir John Hartopp, Baronet, and His Lady, Deceased* (Edinburgh: Sands, Murray, and Cochran, 1769), 167. The present author is deeply indebted to the historical research of Stephen Wright in pointing out this primary source.

13. Isaac Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 167–168.

14. Isaac Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 168.

15. Toon, *The Correspondences of John Owen*, 158, 160–161.

16. Toon, *The Correspondences of John Owen*, 160–161.

17. Toon, *The Correspondences of John Owen*, 160.

18. Toon, *The Correspondences of John Owen*, 160–161.

19. Isaac Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 173.

20. Goold, “Prefatory Note,” in Owen, *Works*, 9:18.

21. Goold, “Preface,” in Owen, *Works*, 8:vii.

family in the evening. Watts mentioned that since Hartopp is now in heaven, “There he has no need to relieve his memory by the swiftness of his pen, which was his *perpetual practice* in the church on earth, and by which means he often entertained his family in the evening worship on the Lord’s day with excellent discourses...”<sup>22</sup> Though one mystery does remain: If Hartopp truly was a committed Nonconformist and faithful member and friend of his pastor, John Owen, why did he not seek to publish in his lifetime all of the sermons and discourses he collected? Why did he wait until the end of his life to have only some sermons published in 1721? These questions are outside the present scope of this work, but may be useful for further inquiry to add subsequent depth to the man who preserved Owen’s latter discourses.

As a committed Nonconformist and member under Owen’s pastoral ministry at the church in Leadenhall Street, Hartopp preserved more than thirteen sermons by Owen via shorthand. The precise number of sermons provided for by the pen of Hartopp remains uncertain because in the 1721 publication of Owen’s posthumous sermons, no clear distinction is made between the sermons collected from Owen’s notes, and those collected from Hartopp’s notes. Hartopp did more, however, than preserve Owen’s sermons. Hartopp had also maintained a manuscript of Owen’s “*A Treatise of the Dominion of Sin and Grace*” which would aid Goold over a century later in his own assembly of Owen’s collected works.<sup>23</sup>

The collected edition, in which the ordination sermons are found, was published posthumously for the first time in 1756 by Hartopp’s granddaughter, Mrs. Cooke. Though Mrs. Cooke would later take subsequent notes from Hartopp to the publisher in 1760,

these successive discourses were concerned with the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The significance of Mrs. Cooke’s work in publishing her grandfather’s sermon notes was recognized only four years after the matter by the Rev. Richard Winter, whom Goold described as “an excellent and useful minister in London” who himself served as a pastor of “Independent Church, New Court, Carey Street.”<sup>24</sup> Winter described the significance of Mrs. Cooke’s efforts in publishing her grandfather’s sermon notes of Pastor Owen in this way, “the world was favored, through your means, with a volume of Dr Owen’s sermons which never before appeared in print...”<sup>25</sup> In its first publication, the collected sermons were preceded by the following advertisement to function as a seal of authenticity:

To the Reader,—The following Discourses were preached by that truly venerable divine in the last century, Dr John Owen: and in order to be fully satisfied they are genuine, Mrs. Cooke of Stoke Newington, by this means informs the reader that her pious grandfather, *Sir John Hartopp, Bart.*, wrote them in shorthand from the Doctor’s own mouth, and then took the pains to transcribe them into long-hand; as thinking them worthy of being transmitted down to posterity. It is from his manuscripts this collection is now made public.<sup>26</sup>

As unofficial sermons released well after the death of Owen and Hartopp, these collected sermons should be viewed as authentic, and yet simultaneously as several steps removed. The dates for the collected sermons range from 1669–1682. The ordination sermons provided are the only existent evidence of how Owen would have conveyed his pastoral theology explicitly to the various congregations from the pulpit. Peter Toon noted Owen’s interactions with other Congregationalist churches for calling and ordaining services, “He also took part, whenever possible, in services of ordination ... he was sometimes asked to be a guest preacher.”<sup>27</sup> On one occasion, Owen participated in the ordination service of Matthew Mead on December 14, 1671 in Stepney, right outside of London.<sup>28</sup> Owen appears to have committed himself to regularly participating in various ordination sermons, and commending other ministers via letter to their tasks.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the only explicit evidence thus far of an example of pastor Owen’s ordination sermons come via Hartopp’s pen.

When considering the sermons printed from Hartopp’s notes, there does not seem to be a pattern as to why some sermons were preserved and others were not. However, there are at least two patterns that do

22. Isaac Watts, *Death and Heaven*, 173.

23. Goold, “Prefatory Note,” in Owen, *Works*, 7:500. Goold notes, “We have had access to a manuscript which belonged to Dr Owen’s friend, Sir John Hartopp, and which contains a large portion of this treatise. It serves to show how many obscure passages in the writings of Owen might have been elucidated and rendered perfectly clear, if the same advantage had been enjoyed in the preparation of his other works for this edition.” *Ibid.*

24. Goold, “Prefatory Note,” in Owen, *Works*, 9:518.

25. Richard Winter, *To Mrs. Cooke of Stoke Newington*, 1760, in Owen, *Works*, 9:519.

26. Goold, “Prefatory Note,” in Owen, *Works*, 9:408; emphasis added.

27. Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 163.

28. A. T. Jones, *Notes on the Early Days of Stepney Meeting*, 1887, 50, quoted in Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 163.

29. *The Records of a Church of Christ meeting at Broadmead, Bristol, 1640–1687*, ed. E. B. Underhill (London: J. Haddon, 1847), 382. Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 163.

	Date Delivered	Sermon Topic	Sermon Text	Sermon Title
1	Thursday, June 27, 1669	The Everlasting Covenant, The Believer's Support Under Distress	2 Samuel 22:5	The Everlasting Covenant, The Believer's Support Under Distress
2	Wednesday, Jan. 1, 1670	The Everlasting Covenant, The Believer's Support Under Distress	2 Samuel 22:5	On the Everlasting Covenant
3	Monday, Jan. 23, 1673	Ordination Sermons	Ephesians 4:8	N/A [Origin of the Ministry]
4	Sunday, April 3, 1678	Ordination Sermons	1 Corinthians 12:11	N/A [Qualifications of the Ministry]
5	Tuesday, Sept. 8, 1682	Ordination Sermons	Jeremiah 3:15	N/A [Duties of the Ministry]
6	Thursday, June 7, 1674	The Excellency of Christ	Psalms 45:1-3	N/A
7	Thursday, June 7, 1674	The Excellency of Christ	Psalms 45:1-3	N/A
8	Thursday, June 14, 1674	The Excellency of Christ	Psalms 45:2	N/A
9	Thursday, June 21, 1674	The Excellency of Christ	Psalms 45:3	N/A
10	Monday, April 9, 1680	The Use and Advantage of Faith	Habakkuk 2:4	The Use and Advantage of Faith in a Time of Public Calamity
11	Tuesday, April 30, 1680	The Use and Advantage of Faith	Habakkuk 2:4	The Use of Faith Under Reproaches and Persecutions
12	Tuesday, May 7, 1680	The Use and Advantage of Faith	Habakkuk 2:4	The Use of Faith, If Popery Should Return Upon Us
13	Tuesday, May 21, 1680	The Use and Advantage of Faith	Habakkuk 2:4	The Use of Faith in a Time of General Declension in Religion

Table 1. Owen's Sermons First Published in 1756<sup>30</sup>

emerge as the sermons are considered as a collection. First, the sermons are ordered chronologically, with the only notable exception being the ordination sermons (Sermons 3–5). The ordination sermons themselves are listed chronologically (1673, 1678, 1682) but the latter two deviate from the overall chronological structure of the collection as a whole. They are wedged between a sermon from 1670 and another from 1674.

The second observable pattern of interest is that each of the chronologically ordered sermons is a part of a sermon series. The first two sermons are on the everlasting covenant, with Owen's main text arising from 2 Samuel 22:5. Sermons 1–2 are six months removed from each other, but Owen alludes to the first sermon in the second where he writes, "I do remember I have spoken

in this place formerly from these words; and delivered somewhat concerning the covenant of God, so far as the exposition of the words did lead me."<sup>31</sup> As already mentioned, the second series listed for Sermons 3–5 are his ordination sermons.<sup>32</sup> Sermons 6–9 are a series on Psalm 45:1–3, and are the only sermons listed with a location: Stadhampton. Sermons 6–9 are the only sequential sermons series being dated on successive Thursdays:

30. The selected sermons come from the transcribed notes of Sir John Hartopp and published courtesy of his granddaughter, Mrs. Cooke for the first time in 1756. The Sermon Topics are taken from Gould's suggested division names with Sermons 3–5 as exceptions, where the present author provided the Sermon Topic names. See *Owen, Works*, 9.408.

31. *Owen, Works*, 9.420.

32. *Owen, Works*, 9.431–462.

June 7, 1674 (2x); June 14; June 21. The final grouping for Sermons 10–13 consider the practical ramifications of faith in light of England’s spiritual decline in Owen’s estimation. Owen’s chief text for this final sermons series is found from Habakkuk 2:4. He delivered these sermons on Monday (Sermon 10) and thereafter on Tuesdays (Sermons 11–13).

As a note of curiosity, it is worth noting, that of all the sermons taken from Hartopp’s collection, only Sermon 4, an ordination sermon, is delivered on the Lord’s Day. There is not enough information to establish why Owen selected one day over the others. However, it may have been to protect himself, his congregation, and others in light of the pressures raised against the Nonconformists. Table 1 on the previous page shows Hartopp’s sermons with the aforementioned data in a more user friendly manner.

It is not clear if the titles provided under the modern collected works as edited by Goold represent the original sermon titles, or if they were added subsequently by Goold, or Hartopp himself.<sup>33</sup>

#### SERMON 1: ORIGIN OF THE MINISTRY

Pastor Owen’s first ordination sermon is all about identifying the Christological origin of pastoral ministry.<sup>34</sup> It was first delivered on January 23, 1673. He provided this thesis statement for his listeners, “The design of these words is to show that the gift of the ministry and of ministers ... is an eminent fruit of the exaltation of Christ, and a great expression and pledge of his care and love towards his church ...” (431). The overall structure of the sermon is divided into two main parts. The first part will be concerned with demonstrating the Christological origin of pastoral ministry and secondarily with highlighting that ordained ministry is “an eminent fruit of the exaltation and mediation of Christ ...” (438).

As presented here, pastoral ministry from beginning to end is rooted in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. John Owen’s first homiletical point is to highlight the pastor as a gift from Christ towards His congregation. Owen said, “The foundation of the ministry is in the gift of Christ ... The ministry, is it from heaven? or is it of men? The answer is in the text, ‘He gave;’—it is the gift of Christ.” (431). In considering Owen’s constant polemical engagement the various extra-biblical offices

established and maintained by the Church of Rome and England, it is not surprising that he would begin his ordination sermon with this Christological foundation. His consideration of Ephesians 4 led him to see the Apostle Paul’s comments on the nature of pastoral ministry as a fulfillment of the prophet Jeremiah. Owen alludes to one of his favorite texts on pastoral ministry: Jeremiah 3:15. There the prophet Jeremiah writes, “I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.” For his listeners, Owen then linked this generic pastoral promise to an explicit Christological prophecy in Jeremiah 23:4–5. Utilizing the Old Testament text, Owen again reiterates his central thesis to the congregation, “It is the great promise, that, under the gospel, Christ would give ministers to his church” (432).

Owen’s own homiletical method comes forward as he proposed an interrogative towards those listeners so as to lead them further in his exposition. Owen asked, “how doth Christ now continue to give ministers to his church?” He answered his own question providing an outline for his listeners so as to guide them in this first section of his sermon. Owen said, “by four ways or means doth Christ continue to give ministers, in all ages, unto his church” (432).

Firstly, Christ has established this gospel ministry in the church and instated it by His own command. What is presented is that this means of gifting the church is an outworking of Christ’s abiding role as the church’s “great mediator” forever. The ordinance of Christ secures the abiding place of pastoral ministry in this present age. Owen roots its indelible character when he notes “it shall never be altered in this world” (432). For Owen, the immutable ordinance of Christ guarantees for every successive generation the unceasing line of ministers from one generation to the next.

Secondly, the Lord Jesus Christ gifts pastors to His church by bestowing spiritual gifts upon these men. Here Owen articulated two related but distinct notes. The first is that a minister of the Gospel needs spiritual gifts in order to accomplish his ordained mission. A minister without the gifts of Christ is no minister at all. Secondarily, Owen argued that the gifts alone do not render a man fit for gospel ministry. Therefore, as an outworking of Christ’s constant care for His people, the Lord Jesus never ceases to equip men for gospel ministry by means of the outpouring of spiritual gifts. Owen said, “If the Lord Jesus Christ should cease to give out spiritual gifts unto men for the work of the ministry ... it must cease also ...” (432). With this remark Owen simultaneously demonstrated the need for spiritual

33. See Table 1 for a table visualizing Sir John Hartopp’s selected sermons, dates delivered, sermon topics, sermon texts and sermon titles.

34. Owen, *Works*, 9.431–441. Hereafter, references to Owen’s works, especially volume 9, are generally made parenthetically.

gifts whilst taking a rhetorical jab against the Church of Rome whom, in Owen's estimate, had lost their access to Christ by means of their apostasy. Against Rome Owen added, "Christ no more giving out unto them of the gifts of his Spirit; and all their outward forms and order, which they can continue, are of no signification in his sight" (432).

Thirdly, the Lord Jesus gifts pastors to His church by equipping His congregations with power to lawfully call spiritually gifted men to ordained ministry. Here Owen added three observations about the sort of power Christ grants to His people. First, this power is not rooted in the individuals themselves, but only insofar as they abide by the words of Christ. As they commit themselves towards his decrees they are enabled to set men apart from ministry "in the name and authority of Jesus Christ alone ..." (433). In addition, the power which Christ bestows towards His people is limited by His own qualifications. The church is not free to choose any man as they see fit. Again, the word and work of Christ must constrain the congregation in the execution of their duties. Owen said, "if Christ hath not pre-instructed and pre-furnished him with gifts, it is not in the power of the church to choose or call him" (433). Lastly, the church must as the body of Christ consent by suffrage to elect such a man to office. The voluntary consent of the congregation to submit towards their elected officer is a requirement and outworking of the power Christ provides unto His congregations. Owen in his most pastoral of moments said to the congregation, "It is the great work you have to do, let me tell you ... in your calling of an officer, to give up yourselves unto him by the will of God, to be led, guided, instructed, directed,—to have the work of the ministry fulfilled among you to your edification ..." (433). Owen revealed to the congregation what they ought to expect in the work of their minister. The minister will lead God's people, guide them, teach them, and show them the way of Christ for their own benefit and edification.

As can be imagined, on this most congregational of notes, Owen took time to help prove this last observation from Scripture. He pointed the congregation firstly to 2 Corinthians 8:5, but then directed them as well towards Numbers 8:9–10. Considering Owen's historical context he wants to help articulate to those present that what is about to transpire in a congregation's setting a man apart to office is not a historical deviation, but what he believed to be the fruit of the most faithful exposition of Scripture. Owen's tangent for Independency led him to direct his listeners to the New Testament data in greater detail. He identifies the Apostolic model of

suffrage in calling Judas Iscariot's replacement in Acts 1:23, the call for the first diaconate in Acts 6, and elders from Acts 14:23. His last word on the subject is summarized in this manner, that every man ever elected to the offices of the church in the New Testament "was done by the election of the multitude, or the body of the church" (435). Owen validated that which was about to transpire in this ordination service, while simultaneously arguing against the power of a diocesan bishop to ordain men to office without the common suffrage of the people.

Fourthly, the Lord Jesus gifts pastors to His church by having the man ordained be set apart by means of prayerful fasting. Owen provided very few remarks on this matter. His brevity may simply be because it is a less contested subject than the preceding point.

As Owen prepared to lead the congregation through the uses of such observations he paused to drive home again what was his ministry's focal point and hopefully that of the fellow Independent congregations. Owen said, "And these, my brethren, are things that we are come together about this day. This is our faith ... wherein we do not pursue our own imaginations ... but from first to last, have our warrant from Christ" (435). Owen's hermeneutic revealed itself to his listeners in that Christ's wishes must be given the final word. In this quote Owen provided the consistent thread through his theological and practical discourse: the supremacy of the Word of Christ in every sphere; including ecclesiology.

Owen took up his polemical considerations as he preached to this assembly. He sought to refute the systems of Rome and England by arguing that where Christ has not instituted an office, no requisite gifts for ministry can be found there. Owen proclaimed, "if Christ hath not appointed that office ... there is a nullity in it,—it is no gift of Christ ... because it wants the law of Christ for its foundation" (436). Again this highlights Owen's central thesis found all throughout his ordination sermons; namely, that the origin of the Christian ministry is rooted in Christ, and the gifts He bestows upon men solely in the offices He has instituted.

Building further upon what Owen has already said, he invited the congregation to identify the pastor as he truly is, "He is a gift of Christ" (436). If a minister can only lawfully come unto a congregation by means of Christ's gifting them, then they stand before a congregation most basically as a gift from Christ to the particular congregations to whom they are sent. Owen makes clear that such a gift as a minister must be received by Christ's congregation in a special way. Owen exhorted the congregation in this manner, "When we

receive so great a gift from Christ, he expects that it be valued, that it be thankfully received, and that it be duly improved" (436). This is Owen's first application of this point. His next application followed naturally upon the minister himself, "it is incumbent upon us [as ministers] to behave ourselves and so to approve ourselves, as that we may own ourselves to be a gift of Christ unto the church ..." (436). Owen marked the weightiness of this application and in doing so provided a window into his own heart, "I do not know, for my own part, a more trembling thought ... 'How shall I approve myself, so as to be looked on as a gift from Christ given unto the church?'" (435).

Owen's method of application exhorted pastors in general, and the minister in particular at this ordination service to seek help from the Lord in order to accomplish this duty. But he also provided three ways in which this might be accomplished. First, in order for pastors to be gifts to their congregations, they must seek to imitate Christ. If pastors are shepherds, they ought to imitate the chief shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to this positive exhortation, Owen also added a word of warning to ministers. By means of their imitation, pastors will be enabled, "to give an account *with comfort* unto the great shepherd of the sheep, when he shall appear at the last day ..." (437; emphasis added). Owen reminded his congregation in these moments that whether faithless or faithful, every minister will one day be called to stand before Christ. Therefore, Owen's general advice to the ministers is that if they conform their lives to resemble Christ, then they can approach the Day of Judgment with hope because they sought to be a gift to Christ's people.

The second manner in which ministers are enabled to be gifts to Christ's congregations is in representing Christ unto them. For Owen, just as Christ has accomplished the office of a mediator by existing as the church's climactic prophet, priest, and king, so the minister in his representation of Christ to the congregation functions analogously towards the people. As a king, the minister represents Christ "in the rule and conduct of the church ..." (437). This governing aspect has its chief end in the well-ordering and edification of the body of Christ on earth. As a prophet, the minister represents Christ by means of faithfully feeding Christ's sheep with the Word of God. This aspect of representation is not optional for Owen. Owen used some of his strongest language with this congregation when talking about the danger of neglecting this aspect of pastoral duty. Owen warned, "Those who take upon themselves to be pastors, and neglect this work of feeding the flock,

may, at as cheap a rate, and with equal modesty, renounce Jesus Christ" (437). A failure in this endeavor is a spiritually capital offense for Owen. Lastly, as a priest, the minister represents Christ by means of his regular ministry of prayer on behalf of the sheep to whom he has been called.

The third manner in which ministers are enabled to be gifts to Christ's congregations is in their "zeal for all the concerns of Christ in the church ..." (438). Zeal in this case for Owen is more than emphatic passion. It involves a regular care and commitment to that which Christ Himself cared for and was committed to. As Owen expressed this before the congregation to whom he was called, this included matters of worship, sacramental purity, evangelism, and the edification of the church.

All that has followed thus far has been clearly didactic, and in many ways an evidence of Owen's contentment to reuse what he expressed elsewhere in his other treatises concerning pastors as Christ's gifts. What is unusual is a parenthetical note which expresses the practical outworking of the suffrage Owen had argued for earlier in his sermon. Of the three ordination sermons this is the only time that Owen paused in the midst of exhortation to allow for the business of the church in electing the man to the ministry of the Word, and providing consent for his ordination. Due to the interesting nature of this digression it would do the reader well to read Owen's guidance at length and the subsequent bracketed note:

And having proceeded so far, I will here stay a little, and desire the church would attend to *their* work and duty. After which, if God give strength, I will speak somewhat more unto the eminency of this gift, according as it is set out in this text.

[Then the church assented to the election, by lifting up of their hands; and the Doctor went on.] (438).

Owen allowed this momentary pause for the church to vote for the pastor-elect. He had already preached in the first half of his ordination sermon about the Christological origin of pastoral ministry. For the remainder of his time Owen presented unto his listeners his conclusory thesis, "*that it is a great and eminent gift*, or an eminent fruit of the exaltation and mediation of Christ ..." (438). Owen proclaimed this major point by means of two heads.

On the one hand, Owen considers Christ's steps in preparing for the gift of the ministry. Here Owen

directed his listeners to the various aspects of the *historia salutis*, such as the exaltation of Christ in His ascension and the pouring out of His Spirit on Pentecost. For example, though Owen does not explicitly allude to Ephesians 4:8, he references the Old Testament passage quoted by the Apostle Paul: Psalm 68:18. Most unexpectedly, Owen rendered this portion of the ordination sermon into a typological exposition of the biblical theological connections. Specifically, Owen has in mind Christ's explicit manifestation of power in his victory over Satan and in bestowing ministers to His churches. Also, Owen proclaimed to this congregation Christ's implicit acts in his Christophanic displays of power amongst the church of the Old Testament, and the unity of Christ's saving work. In one of his most exhortatory of moments, Owen made a bold claim amongst the congregation, "There is a greater glory in giving a minister to a poor congregation, than there is in the instalment and enthroning of all popes ... Christ is upon his theatre of glory in the communication of this office and these officers" (439). Owen redirected the attention of his listeners from the outward show of the Church of Rome at that time and what Owen would see in England, and exhorted the people to consider the sufficiency of the ministry as they have received it in its Spirit-originated simplicity. In juxtaposition to the visible glory of the ordination of Aaron the High Priest, Owen reminded his listeners of the surpassing worth and glory of the New Covenant ordination of a gospel minister. He not only echoed the Apostle Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 3:10 in these moments but hoped to train the congregation to interpret their historical moment aright. Owen said, "The reason why we see not the glory of it is, because we are carnal. It is a spiritual glory. God himself presides over the work of this day ... God walks among us this day; Christ is among us by his special presence" (439). In comparison with the visible luster of Rome, the plain and ordinary lodgings of the Independents would appear lack luster to the senses. Owen's pastoral sensibilities are put on display in his homiletical considerations as he led the congregants in these moments to recognize that which was unseen. Not only is he speaking about the presence of the Triune God but even the courts of angels are present in such services of worship "Because they are present as *witnesses* in the collation of authority from Christ" (440).

On the other hand, Owen directed his readers to the estate of Christ's humiliation as a preparation for the gift of ministers. Owen's chief text remains central to his argumentation. He alluded to the descent of Christ to refer to His death as explained in Ephesians 4:9. Though

he allowed for two options in interpretation, he appealed to Christ's burial as the best interpretive option. But the work of Christ in the accomplishment of redemption provides the ripe seed bed for Owen's understanding of pastoral ministry. Owen illustrated this for the congregation when he preached, "[The ministry is] a branch that grew out of the grave of Christ ... had not Christ died for it, we had not had a ministry in the world" (441).

Owen proclaimed that the death of Christ must empower the entirety of gospel ministry. The exaltation of Christ and its bestowal of ministers as gifts unto the church can only come by means of Christ's humiliation. In addition, the very message of the minister is that reconciliation between God and man which is only secured by the death of the Son of God. All of these factors combine together to illuminate for the congregation that the pastors of Christ's church are gifts which bud from the cross of Christ. Peace came to the world by means of Christ extending Himself by the gifts of ministers in the proclamation of the gospel.

#### SERMON 2: QUALIFICATIONS OF THE MINISTRY

Pastor Owen's second ordination sermon was all about identifying the qualifications of pastoral ministry (9.441–452). It was delivered on April 3, 1678. He chose 1 Corinthians 12:11 as his main text, a classic section of Scripture pointing to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Owen provided eight points to his listeners, and concluded with three motives. What is expected in this section, even from its inception, is a rigorously pneumatic approach to the qualifications of a pastor. However, what becomes clear as the sermon unfolds is that the qualifications of pastoral ministry are rooted in the work of Christ, and His role is made paramount for Owen in rendering men fit for office. What will be made clear as the sermon is examined is that every work of the Spirit always functions under the shadow of Christ. Though there is a clear pneumatic element in the outworking of Owen's Christology, his pneumatology always serves his Christology.<sup>35</sup>

The second ordination sermon comes in the spring of 1678 while Owen's declining health affected his pulpit ministry. From the outset of the sermon he noted his own failing health, and its impact on his ability to preach on that occasion. Owen wrote, "There is this disadvantage in preaching upon a particular occasion, especially for one who hath no more strength than I

35. Contra Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 440.

...” (441). Owen’s deteriorating health was a constant factor throughout his later years. He notes its effect on him in this sermon as well as the next. His fading health was a constant source of trouble as he strained himself to perform even the most basic task of preaching. It is worth noting that all which transpired in his second sermon began with a limited scope. He admitted the need to omit several elements from his sermon for his health’s sake. Nevertheless, that which was delivered still bore this seal from Owen’s lips, “I shall only give you the substance of the words, in that proposition which I intend to insist upon ...” (442). He also made mention of the limited time available to him for this end. Therefore, when considering his second ordination sermon, Owen’s health and time constraints must be taken into account as parameters controlling his words. Too much should not be drawn from his words as presented. Instead they ought to be allowed to add to Owen’s general pastoral theology, and particularly its Christological and pneumatological aspect, without domineering the entire conversation.

Owen’s guiding proposition is echoed in two forms from the outset. The initial proposition established the trajectory broadly for the rest of Owen’s sermon. Owen preached, “... it is the work of the Spirit of God, in all ages of the church, to communicate spiritual gifts and abilities to those who are called according to his mind to the ministry of the church, to enable them unto all evangelical administrations, to his glory, and the edification of the church” (442). Owen was establishing for his listeners the pneumatological foundation for all of pastoral ministry, or so it seemed. His eight subsequent heads for his sermon will help to shed necessary light on his pastoral ministry and the Spirit-wrought qualifications necessary for its execution.

First, Pastor Owen began by pointing his listeners to the Lord Jesus Christ. He reminded his listeners of Christ’s unique abiding presence with His church. The nature of Christ’s presence to His church will be taken later in the sermon, but for now it is sufficient to note that Owen recognized this presence as the key distinguisher between the church, and every other group established by men. Owen said that it is Christ’s abiding presence with his people “which essentially and fundamentally differenceth his church from any other assembly...” The church alone is Christ’s “temple and habitation” (442). From a polemical angle, Owen used this starting point as a means of arguing against opposing church orders. The sermon is not as explicit, as he often can be, but his warnings seem to be aimed at the Church of Rome at least, and likely the Church of

England. Owen warned the congregation, “if Christ be not present with them, when they have done, they are *no gospel church*. They want a foundation ... [and] sooner it will tumble down and come to nothing” (943). Christ’s unique presence with His people is the necessary foundation for every church. Owen was warning his listeners that the outward shows of a church are rendered impotent if Christ be not present. Having considered the outward splendor of Moses’ Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple, Owen articulated that what a gospel church required was not the outward splendors of gorgeous churches and cathedrals but “*the glory of Christ to enter into them*” (943).

Second, the means of Christ’s abiding presence with His church is by none other than His Holy Spirit. Owen used the pulpit to invite his listeners to consider the various manners of Christ’s presence. Beginning with His divinity, Christ is omnipresent Owen proclaimed. Moving to His Incarnation, Owen added that the Lord Jesus Christ was present locally upon the earth for time and a season. But for Owen in his sermon, the abiding presence of Christ with His church must supersede these ordinary and expected ways. Here Owen directed his listeners to the glory of Pentecost. In a quip pointed clearly at Rome, Owen preached, “Christ hath no vicar, but the Spirit.” He considered the historic works of Christ in redemption, namely in His estate of exaltation. Again, considering the fruits of Pentecost in the ministry of the Apostles and Christ’s abiding presence, Owen preached, “I need not prove this; it hath been the faith of the *catholic church*, from the first foundation of it, that the promised presence of Christ with his church was *by his Spirit*” (944). By these words, Owen was presenting his theological system as the faithful budding of the Western Catholic tradition.

Third, Owen now shifted from persons to structures; here he considered God’s covenant with His church. Looking to Isaiah 59:21 as his main text to support his covenantal structure, Owen proceeded to utilize a catechetical form in the midst of his sermon to explicate the text. Owen said, “To whom is this promise made? It is made unto the gospel church.” He again moves back a verse to Isaiah 59:20 to catechetically instruct the congregation. Owen preached, “With whom? With them the Redeemer comes to in Zion, to redeem from iniquity. What is God’s covenant with them? It is his word; *his word shall be in them*” (944). The covenant of God secures the promises between God and His people, and its foundation is built on the word and the Spirit. Should this covenant be removed, the church itself would be removed as well.

Fourth, Owen guided his listeners from the foundations of the church to its Spiritual ministry. Here he juxtaposed the Apostle Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 3:6–8 to distinguish between the ministry of the letter, which leads to death, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which brings forth life. Nevertheless, it was always by means of the Spirit that divine revelation came to the people of God. Owen preached, "the Spirit of God revealed all the ordinances and ministrations of old, from first to last, even the little additions that David made after Moses' time . . . so was the law the ministration of the Spirit, because the Spirit revealed that" (445). The ministry of the Spirit stands upon the foundation of Christ's work, and is an outworking of Christ's abiding presence amongst His people.

Fifth, Owen preached about the purpose of the Spirit's presence for the church. Here he highlighted for his listeners the monergistic reality for all church vitality. Though he took a moment to rebut those who would build the ministry upon the will of men, Owen proclaimed the foundational nature of the Spirit's work as an ever-present means of establishing life in the church. If the Spirit is absent, life is absent in the church. But this work is not relegated merely to the Spirit. The Spirit Himself must be sent by the Son. But even there in the midst of Owen's comments, his rigorous and explicit trinitarian theology came forward, and each of the divine person's distinct work is portrayed, though only for a moment. Owen preached, "if God should cease to communicate the Spirit as to an internal, saving work upon the hearts of the elect, the church would cease as to its internal form. No church would have a relation unto *Jesus Christ* as the mystical head, if *God* should cease to communicate the *Spirit* as to gifts." Owen reiterates for his listeners that there is a necessary communion of work in the Godhead in the salvation of poor sinners. What began as a trinitarian emphasis by Owen, shifted back to the pneumatic. What followed appears to establish the third person of the trinity as the foundation of pastoral ministry. Owen made remarks such as "The sum of all you do this day is, your acknowledging *Jesus Christ* to be the Lord. . . . You must have the Spirit of God and his presence, in order to do this" (9.447). How does Owen's sixth head color what has been already said?

Sixth, Owen sought to prove further all that had been said thus far on the purpose of the Holy Spirit from the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14–30, and the list of spiritual gifts from Romans 12:4–8. Throughout Owen's writings he utilized the same Scripture texts to argue the same points (e.g., *Works*, 4.504–506.). *A Discourse of*

*Spiritual Gifts* was released posthumously, like the ordination sermons. It is unclear if Owen's ordination sermon affected his work in *A Discourse of Spiritual Gifts*, or conversely if his pneumatological studies concerning the ordinary officers of the church affected his ordination sermons. Regardless, what is clear for Owen's readership is that he was consistent on this matter both in the study and in the pulpit.

In the Parable of the Talents, Owen highlighted that every talent represents spiritual gifts and each comes from Christ. Their origin is rooted in His will, and His power as king to dispense as He sees fit. Owen preached, "It is agreed by all, that they are spiritual abilities that Christ gives his servants to trade with in the administration of gospel ordinances" (9.448). Owen repeatedly emphasized the Christocentricity in the origin of spiritual gifts. The gifts under consideration are specifically those which are requisite for the ordinary ministry of gospel churches. Owen emphasized, "wherever *Jesus Christ* calls and appoints a minister in his house . . . he gives him spiritual abilities to do that work by the Holy Ghost." Yes, the Spirit is present, necessary and bears a fundamental role in what Christ is accomplishing in His Church, however, there is peculiarity in the work of Christ that stands behind the Spirit's work. The main idea provided by Owen to this congregation, and the minister to be ordained in that instance, is that Christ intends for His ministers to utilize the very gifts He's furnished them with. "This is plain in the parable," Owen proclaimed, "that those who have received talents, or spiritual gifts and abilities of the Holy Ghost, they are to trade with them." Owen warned that the gifts of Christ given by the Spirit are not the same as the natural gifts they bear. In addition, a word of caution came out, which may be surprising to some in considering how voluminous Owen was as a writer. Owen's final word on the matter of the Parable of the Talents comes with a word of caution, "*I have known some good men have been so addicted to their study that they have thought the last day of the week sufficient to prepare for their ministry, though they employ all the rest of the week in other studies.* But your great business is, to trade with your *spiritual abilities*" (448). In light of Owen's own literary career, it is likely, that this wisdom which he proclaimed on the Lord's Day long ago was a piece of wisdom he daily had to be reminded of himself.

As Owen redirected his listeners to Paul's epistle in Romans 12:4–8, he manifestly upheld the essential role of Christ's gifts to Christ's officers. In the strongest language that Owen could muster, he said, "I profess to you I had rather a thousand times be of their opinion,

bad as it is, who say that all church-state is ceased, than that there may be a church-state when these gifts and graces are not." There is no possibility in Owen's theological scheme where the church can exist apart from Christ's constant supply of grace and gifts by means of His Spirit. He continued, "gifts are the foundation of all church work.... If there be no spiritual gifts, there is no spiritual work" (449). The task of pastoral ministry, and indeed of all ministry, is too great to rest upon the shoulders of men in their natural ability and skill. Either Christ will furnish the man of His choosing with gifts proportional to His own desires, or there shall be nothing. The church is Christ's bride and rests upon His own daily provisions, which was a natural segue into Owen's next homiletical point.

Seventh, the church from beginning to end is dependent upon the spiritual gifts of Christ for her constant existence. Owen preached, "There can be no gospel administration without spiritual gifts ... thus there is a necessity of spiritual gifts for their administration: so that *spiritual gifts and spiritual administrations live and die together*" (449). Unexpectedly, after considering the necessity of spiritual gifts for ministry, Owen led the congregation to whom he was preaching to consider the various shades of apostasy that had assaulted the church from the very beginning. Though tangential to the overall function of his ordination sermon, Owen did provide a short apology for why he believed the early church faltered. Owen preached, that it "was by neglect and contempt of spiritual gifts.... This was the ground of the apostasy of the primitive church;— they grew weary of spiritual ministrations" (450). Here Owen connected the failures and sins of the church's past to his own present context as he preached against the Church of Rome and England, "They found out imaginations suited to their inclinations; they will have prayerbooks to read, ceremonies to perform, and a number of inventions to keep up a form of worship *without* those spiritual gifts." In short, Owen's argument as presented unto the congregation is that the liturgical complexities and additions of the Church of Rome and England (in Owen's theological perspective) are founded upon this single principle of neglecting the spiritual gifts God granted, and replacing them with the inventions of men. Owen concluded "The principle of the apostasy of all churches in the world is, from a weariness of serving God by the aid and assistance of the Spirit" (450).

Eighth, Owen proposed the necessity of the experiential dynamic amongst God's people. Owen raised questions to the congregation asking if Christ had not made

His presence known to them by the ministry of their officers. Owen asked them, "Have you not had a *proof of the Spirit of Christ speaking in them?* 2 Cor. xii. 3." Owen did not then propose much beyond his terse comment on the experiential dynamic amongst the congregation. He thereafter reiterated all that had been said thus far as he reminded the congregation that "where the gifts of the Spirit of God, as to the gospel ministrations of the church, are lost or neglected," so God Himself and every fruit of the ministry shall be absent as well (451). In short, no gifts means no living church.

As Owen transitioned into his conclusory exhortation, his comments were aimed explicitly to the ministers present, and the man being set apart that day. His exhortation was simple and accompanied by three motives. His exhortation was, "attend unto the ministry whereunto God hath called them upon this foundation." His first motive towards this end is as sobering as it is dour. Owen writes, "First, It is *the most difficult ministration* of any that a person can be called unto ..." (451). What makes it so difficult? Owen warned that such a ministry could depend merely on outward liturgical form rather than the Spirit, like that ministry of Rome. Owen warned that a minister's natural skills may hamper his ministry as he might depend on them rather than the Spirit and His gifts. But this stern warning is accompanied as well with another word of caution, "If grace decays in our hearts, a ministry in gifts will grow burdensome and displeasing to ourselves, as well as useless to the congregation" (451).

Owen's initial motive to exhort the fellow pastors to attend unto their ministry was intended to remind every one of them of their first calling: to care for the flock of God, and to do so carefully, regularly, and dependently. Again Owen epigrammatically preached, "A man may preach a very good sermon, who is otherwise himself; but he will never make a *good minister of Jesus Christ*, whose heart and mind is not always in the work" (451). Owen's pastoral insight is simple: a ministry which glorifies Christ is beyond the natural scope of any, and therefore must regularly seek to be strengthened and empowered by Christ. Owen's second motive is that ray of sunshine which erupts through the dark canopy of clouds; it is the magnificence and splendor inherently bound to the work of pastoral ministry itself. Lastly, Owen's final motive came with the weighty reminder that no other ministry than gospel ministry can lead "unto the edification and building up of the church, Eph. iv. 8, etc." (452). There is no other path or means by which Christ shall build His church. With this comment, Owen sought to spur those ministers

on towards the task which Christ had called them. He had left them with an exhortation, and concluded his comments to them with a blessing, “The Lord prosper it in your hands!” (452).

Owen’s final comments were delivered explicitly to the congregation. Just as he had spurned the ministers to fulfill their offices well, so he exhorted the congregation to execute their prescribed ministry. They are to know what God demands of them, especially with reference to their relationship to the minister. Lastly, he exhorted them to pray. The congregation was not to be passive in Owen’s structure. They too had a vital ministry, which differed in function though not in importance. “Pray unto God for a fresh communication of gifts unto them.... It is a renewed act of grace that prepares and opens the soul for receiving new communications of God’s grace, for the administration of the holy things of Christ in the congregation. Pray much for them to that end and purpose.”<sup>36</sup>

Owen’s last comments highlighted for the congregation then, and for his readership today, the robust and communal dynamic of his pastoral theology. Pastors are empowered for their ministry by Christ gifting them through His Spirit, but the success and sustenance of their ministry is directly contingent upon the ministry of prayer; first, amongst the minister himself, and then by his congregation. This sermon also highlighted that ordination sermons are not merely for the benefit of ordained ministers. Ordination sermons enable the laity of Christ’s congregations to know what they ought to expect from their ministers, but also what their ministers expect from them. Unexpressed expectations always lead to dissonance. So ordination sermons, such as this, and especially the one to follow, enable congregations and ministers to be explicit about how their partnership can only lead to their mutual edification.

### SERMON 3: DUTIES OF THE MINISTRY

Pastor Owen’s third ordination sermon is all about conveying the duties of pastoral ministry (9.452–462). For that purpose, Owen turned to Jeremiah 3:15 as his sermon text. It was delivered on September 8, 1682. Around the same time as this ordination sermon, Owen used this very text from Jeremiah in his treatise, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*, for the same purpose (16.74). As the sermon will be examined, the consistency of thought between Owen’s sermon and treatise will be made clear.

In addition to his own health issues, he admitted that his goal for this ordination sermon was not to be

exhaustive, only sufficient. Owen clarified for the congregation to whom he preached, “I do not design to go through all the necessary duties of a pastor or teacher; I only design to give *some* instances” (9.453; emphasis added). Near the sermon’s conclusion Owen again invited his listeners to recognize his own limitations, and his failing health comes forward in his latter comment. Owen preached, “Had I *time* and *strength*, I should tell you of the duty of pastors and teachers in administering of the seals, and what is required thereunto ...” (462; emphasis added).

Considering when Owen is delivering this sermon adds some color to the text itself as a reader. Owen himself recognized that his own death was not far off. A month before this ordination service, Owen had written to his dear friend Charles Fleetwood for encouragement and prayer. In the midst of his requests Owen wrote, “Pray for me that I may do soe, for the near approach of my dissolution calls for it earnestly.”<sup>37</sup> He even hints at the recognition of his looming death in this last ordination sermon, and the reality that his own hopes for religious renewal throughout England will not come in his lifetime. Owen remarked, “Christ hath instituted a beautiful order in his church, if it were discovered and improved. And I have wished sometimes I could live to see it; but I do not think I shall” (9.453). Less than a year after delivering this sermon as Owen’s strength was finally taken from him, he would be received into the arms of his Savior.

The duties as they are presented in Owen’s final sermon still provided a window into what he considered to be of upmost importance in conveying the duties of pastoral ministry. Each duty listed by Owen was accompanied by various methods of accomplishment. Both the overall duty and accompanying methods will be examined below. The overall structure of his ordination sermon can be organized under four heads:

1. Feed the Church of Christ;
2. Pray for the Church of Christ;
3. Contend for the Church of Christ;
4. Add Souls to the Church of Christ.

36. Owen, *Works*, 9.452. It would seem by Owen’s comment that more than one man was set apart for ordained ministry on the occasion of this ordination sermon. Owen mentioned “those you have called and made officers this day.” *Ibid.*

37. Toon, *The Correspondence of John Owen*, 173.

## DUTY #1: FEED THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Owen began his explication of the duties of pastoral ministry by quoting Jeremiah 3:15. The pastor's first duty is "to feed the church with knowledge and understanding" (453). Owen conveyed the initial manner of accomplishing the task, "This feeding is by preaching of the gospel. He is no pastor who doth not feed his flock" (453). The primacy of the proclamation of the Word is an abiding feature in Owen's pastoral theology. His method is not simply to preach Bible verses and be settled on the matter. Instead, he invited the congregation to carefully consider the methods by which this duty is called to be accomplished.

His first method is to highlight the centrality of wisdom in order to accomplish the work of feeding the flock of Christ with the Word of God. Wisdom is necessary in order to both understand God's mysteries, which have been unveiled in the Scriptures, and then to convey what God has revealed to others. Owen proclaimed, "Really it is no easy thing for ministers to instruct to such kind of duties.... We must labour ourselves to have a thorough knowledge of these mysteries, or we shall be useless to a great part of the church" (454). That which is not understood cannot be declared. So the first method for a minister to faithfully feed the church with the gospel is to be familiar with it himself.

Owen's second method calls for ministers and the congregation to recognize that pastors bear their authority from God. A minister does not receive authority by virtue of his office. Though not made explicit in Owen's ordination sermon, what lies in the background is Owen's consistent and constant polemic against the Church of Rome and England. Owen points his listeners to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the necessity of unction. To this end, Owen juxtaposes the call of the scribes who had a call void of unction, and the Lord Jesus Christ who was without a call, yet bore unction beyond measure. Owen's final comment on the matter encourages his listeners, and especially the ministers that an outward call is irrelevant if the work of the Holy Spirit is absent in the minister. Owen said, "preaching in the demonstration of the Spirit ... is nothing less than the evidence in preaching of unction, in the communication of gifts and grace unto them, for the discharge of their office ..." (455).

The third method Owen presented as necessary in order to feed the flock with Christ's Word was the

38. The present author is indebted to Chad Van Dixhoorn for presenting the possibility of Owen's recycling of his written materials for homiletical ends, and potentially for the aforementioned reasons.

minister's experiential knowledge of the truths of Scripture. Owen's cleverness as a wordsmith was apparent as he memorably exhorted his listeners with a simple sentence, "I think, truly, *that no man preaches that sermon well to others that doth not first preach it to his own heart*" (455). Not only is his statement beneficial for this third method, but in many ways it is symptomatic of Owen's pastoral theology as whole. Owen echoes the very same concept in *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*. There Owen warns of what transpires by those ministers who are experientially removed from that which they preach. Owen warned, "The want of this experience of the power of gospel truth on their own souls is that which gives us so many lifeless, sapless orations, quaint in words and dead as to power, instead of preaching the gospel in the demonstration of the Spirit" (16.76). Where a want of experience is found, the Spirit is not. In both, the treatise and his ordination sermon, Owen pointed his audience towards the same illustration of poison, "And he that doth not feed on and thrive in the digestion of the food which he provides for others ... knows not but the food he hath provided may be poison, unless he have really tasted of it himself" (16.76). When both examples are considered, Owen appears to be exhibiting a consistency across the mediums of pen and pulpit, or more simply, he may be reusing former writings for the sake of a sermon due to time or his own health.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless his concerns remain the same; he yearns for a reformation in England. Owen's remarks are tinged with sorrow as he wrote, "though there be twenty or thirty thousand in orders, yet the nation perishes for want of knowledge, and is overwhelmed in all manner of sins, and not delivered from them unto this day" (9.455). Owen was not claiming that England's pulpits are empty, nor that the Scriptures are failing to be read throughout the land of England. That which is lacking, in his estimation, is powerful preaching which originates from a shepherd's heart who is zealous for the good of his sheep.

Owen's fourth method of feeding Christ's sheep is by means of carefully and skillfully delivering the Word of God unto the people of God. Owen is disproportionately terse concerning this method as well as the next. However, what is lacking here is made up elsewhere in Owen's other writings (e.g., 16.76).

Owen's fifth method is equally as concise as the fourth. Owen added that the fifth method whereby ministers are able to feed Christ's flock, "Requires *the knowledge* and consideration of the state of our flocks" (9.455). Owen is simultaneously instructing ministers of their expected duties whilst warning ignorant pastors

of the danger of their negligence. The practical angle as well is of highest importance. If it is true that a minister must commit himself to carefully feeding Christ's flock, than he must know what sort of food they need. Owen utilizes negative examples in his sermon, but should they be inversed what comes forth is a helpful guide as to how pastors can go about acquiring a knowledge of their congregations. For example, a minister ought to consider their temptations, their places of spiritual growth and development, their points of decline and feebleness, and the extent of their comprehension of the mysteries of the gospel (456). By such means, Owen implicitly and inadvertently contends, how a pastor may come to know his congregation, and thereafter faithfully feed them with the particular portion of Scripture to meet their specific needs.

Owen's sixth and final method, insofar as his ordination sermon is concerned, contended for pastors to be zealous for the salvation of lost sinners and God's glory. He says nothing more about this final point limiting its exhortation to a single sentence. It may be possible that Hartopp has perhaps fumbled in his notetaking at this point in the sermon. Perhaps Owen's limitations did cause him to pause, and consider what he said as sufficient. But following his succinct comment on zeal he immediately reviewed all that he has said to this point under the first head.

Owen provided an application after his review to both minister and congregation. His application is crucial for all that has come before, and did follow in his sermon. Why is that? He reminded the congregation that they are not simply to sit back and be ministered unto in these words. They have a vital ministry by the Holy Spirit, and have been called to the priestly ministry of prayer. Both minister and member are called to pray for each other, and especially for the ministers success in his task. Owen preached, "we have great need to pray for ourselves, and that you should pray for us. Pray for your ministers" (456). As Hartopp's remaining sermon notes reveal, a pastor's ministry can be immensely blessed and advanced through the efforts of his faithful members. Owen modeled this final point in his own life through his regular correspondences with Charles Fleetwood. Owen's final comment on prayer naturally segued towards his second duty necessary for pastors.

#### DUTY #2: PRAY FOR THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Owen began this second duty by stating that which is necessary for pastors "is *continual prayer* for the churches over which Christ hath made them overseers"

(456). Owen provided this spiritual claim, but again admitted to the limited scope of his then present exhortation. "I have not time" Owen remarked "to confirm these things by particular testimonies: you know how often the apostle expresses it of himself, and enjoins it unto others, continually to pray for the flock" (456). What is ironic, however, is that after his initial caveat, Owen proceeds to further elaborate what he means by this second duty.

His first division comes as he seeks to provide an apology as to why it is requisite of pastors to pray for their particular congregations. First, Owen considered private regular prayer for the flock as a chief evidence of the pastor's care for his people, and his being gifted by God towards this end. Owen attached a severe rebuke towards any lazy pastors who would fail to undertake this present parcel of their ministerial calling. Owen warned, "Let him preach as much as he will, visit as much as he will, speak as much as he will, unless God doth keep up in him a *spirit of prayer* in his closet and family for them, he can have no evidence ... that what he doth is accepted with God" (456). A prayerless ministry is a powerless ministry. In Owen's estimate, a prayerless pastor is a spiritual pauper, who lacks even the most basic elements to feed himself let alone the flock of Christ.

The second reason ministers are required to pray, according to Owen, is far more positive than the last. Ministers continue steadfastly in their prayers for the flock that they might be a blessing unto them. Owen included himself in his strong comment, "there is no other way whereby we can bless our flock by institution, but by a *continual praying* for a blessing upon them" (457).

Owen thirdly reminded the men that pastoral ministry is rooted in love and therefore their ministry of prayer must be grounded in love as well. As Christ loved his flock, so ministers must follow after His example. Owen warned from experience that ministry will always be followed by various shades of failure. Evil may fall upon the congregation from without. Sin and its temptations may burst from within. However, that which will sustain a pastor's ministry through the throes of darkness is prayer rooted in love for Christ's sheep. Owen writes, "nothing can keep up his heart with inflamed love towards them, but by praying for them continually" (457).

The fourth and final reason Owen presented for the pastor's continual ministry of prayer deals with spiritually intimacy. Owen proclaimed, "in our prayers for our people, *God will teach us what we shall preach unto them*" (457). The idea of intimacy is especially pronounced on this climactic reason for continual prayer.

Prayer is a pleading from earth to heaven for the souls committed under a pastor's charge. He anchored his fourth reason in the Apostolic example of Acts 6:4. But Owen's bottom line followed in this manner, "The more we pray for our people, the better shall we be instructed what to preach to them" (457).

Sufficiently satisfied with what had been said, Owen now progressed to make clear the substance of that which was to be prayed for. Again, Owen laid out four topics for consideration in the pastor's regular ministry of prayer. Owen said that a minister of the Word must pray first, "For *the success of the word* that we preach unto them." In Owen's sermon, he boldly claimed that the success of a pastor's ministry was dependent upon his own prayer for his congregation. Should this be abandoned, Owen warned, "unless there come the showers of the Spirit upon them, there will be no profiting" (457). Profiting in Owen's pastoral theology means a Christian's spiritual growth in their knowledge and love for God.

The second recommended content of prayer for Owen included a call "to pray *for the presence of Christ* in all our assemblies . . ." (457). Here, Owen proclaimed, is the source of all ministerial strength and power, for the absence of Christ guarantees the absence of ministerial success. Every flicker in the flame of ministry must burst from the hearth of Christ. His unique presence in His church by His Spirit is the only conduit of life for His congregations. Therefore, it is the ministers chief duty in prayer, to seek after such ends. "Make this your business," Owen implored his fellow ministers, "to pray mightily for it in the congregation, to make all these [ordinances] effectual" (458).

Owen initially claimed that there would be four items considered concerning the content of that prayer requisite of ministers. However, whether by Hartopp's scribal errors or Owen's own forgetfulness, only three are listed. Therefore, Owen provided his third and final comment on the content of ministerial prayer. Pastors are called to pray for the unique and specific needs of each member of his own congregation. Owen proclaimed, "our prayers should be for a communication of supplies unto them continually, in all these cases" (458). Owen's final comments on the content of pastoral prayer are quite telling. His list of the various spiritual situations in which members may find themselves reflect the various categories of Christians such as the fallen, the established, the backslidden, the tempted, the faithful, the overwhelmed and the like (458). According to Owen, ministers must chiefly recognize that all sorts of Christians exist in their congregations who are to varying degrees growing in their sanctification, or may not even be regenerate.

However, Owen remarked that what is required is a ministry of specific prayer for the particular spiritual maladies of their members that Christ may strengthen them in the precise way they need. Owen concluded his section on prayer with a pastoral exhortation to guide the clergy and encourage the congregation. Owen said, "our prayers should be for a communication of supplies unto them continually, in all these cases" (458).

#### DUTY #3: CONTEND FOR THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Owen's own ministry was replete with his third duty of pastoral ministry: contending for the truth. What is expected is Owen's utilization of the pastoral epistles as exemplary for the continual ministry of pastors in fighting against heresy, schism, and all lies against Scripture. Owen symbolically interpreted Song of Solomon 4:4 as a broad description of the defensive tenor of pastoral ministry. Owen proclaimed to the congregation then assembled, "The ministers of the gospel are shields and bucklers to defend the truth against all adversaries and opposers" (458). Spiritual pacifism in the arena of theological truth claims is tantamount to spiritual betrayal. A pastor's ministry necessarily involves the active engagement of spiritual opponents, regardless of when or where they may arise. Owen proposed four points to answer how a minister ought to go about defending the truth.

The first method of defense that Owen proclaimed is clear proof that he never shied away from declaring the obvious. In order to defend the truth, ministers first must know the truth. Owen warns that truth can dissipate from the minds of the faithful by means of "weakness as well as by wickedness. . . ." However, the twin dangers can be conquered by "diligent prayer and study. . ." (459).

The second method of preserving truth comes by means of the heart. A mere knowledge of the truth is insufficient for Owen. Love is that guiding power in Owen's pastoral theology which maintains the primacy of the truth in the pastors themselves. Owen warned then, "I fear there is much loss of truth, not for want of light, knowledge, and ability, but *for want of love*" (459). In the midst of his explanation Owen provided an unexpected autobiographical note about his personal experience with the pastors who never wavered in contending for the truth. The information provided is insufficient to mark out which event Owen is speaking of, but it may be concerning the ministers ejected on Black Bartholomew's Day, August 24, 1662. Due to the relative rarity of Owen's biographical notes in his writings, his comment will be attached in full:

I have the advantage of most here present in this, that I know the contest we had for the truths of the gospel before our troubles began, and was an early person engaged in them; and knew those godly ministers that did contend for them as for their lives and souls, and that all the opposition that was made against them was never able to discourage them (459).

Owen's wisdom remained: love the truth, so that in the day of testing you may cling to it, even against insurmountable odds. What are these truths? For Owen they are the essential doctrines once celebrated by the Reformers, then coming under scorn. Nevertheless, Owen imparted this lasting counsel to the ministers and congregants then, and by virtue of Hartopp's efforts, ministers and congregants today, "These truths are not lost for want of skill, but want of love ... we must not be ashamed of truth" (459). Therefore, the church must love the truth.

Owen's third method of contending for the truth came by rejecting "novel opinions" which were as popular then as they are today (459). Owen mentioned justification explicitly amongst other precious doctrines rediscovered in the Reformation that needed to be contended for. Owen explicitly called his listeners to consider the faithful pastors of the Reformation as models. He described the doctrines then contended as "the soul and life of them whom are gone before us ..." (459). In order to follow that godly legacy, Owen implored his listeners, pastor and laity alike, of their need to find comfort in the very doctrines the Reformers found their comfort in. Nevertheless, as he decried the Church of England in the midst of such an antagonistic setting, he implored those ministers present as he said, "let us, for the remainder of our days ... be zealous and watchful over any thing that should arise in our congregations" (460). In other words, in Owen's pastoral theology spiritual vigilance is naturally conceived from the parents of Comfort and the Truth.

Owen's fourth method is brief and involves the minister's "skill and ability" to grapple with heretical teaching (460). Spiritual disciplines are fundamental in a minister's success against the quibbles of heretics, nevertheless, that which is necessary may be beyond a minister. Here Owen encouraged pastors to seek out the advice of "those who are more exercised in them, to give them help and assistance" (460).

#### DUTY #4: ADD SOULS TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Owen's final explicit duty has to deal with evangelism

and conversion. Owen preached, "*we labour diligently for the conversion of souls*" (460). Owen is not denying the usefulness of the laity in their own evangelistic efforts in seeking to spread gospel. He admitted, "I confess there are other outward ways and means whereby men have been, and may be, converted" (460). However, there is an inherent priority of ministers in evangelism as Owen noted, "principally this work is committed unto the pastors of churches, for the conversion of souls" (460). The work of evangelism and the careful pursuit of the spiritually lost cannot be relegated to a committee or any other group. For Owen, pastors have been uniquely charged by Christ towards this end, and they accomplish such a goal by means of preaching in the congregations which have called them as well as in the pulpits of others.

#### CONCLUSION

Owen's last words on the matter bear a hint of sorrow as he admits his own restraints, both by means of his waning health and limited time. In his conclusion, he only provided in swift fashion the various other duties he wished to speak on such as the sacraments, soul-care, ruling the church, a pastor's need to live a godly life, and partnering with other like-minded congregations. The insufficiencies of men for the task of pastoral ministry led Owen to request diligent prayer from God's people one last time in his conclusion. Though Owen's own biographical notes are notoriously scant, his humility shines throughout the whole work, and especially in his last sentence as he never fails to include himself as one needing to accomplish these very pastoral duties. Owen's own limitations were becoming more apparent as he neared his grave. Nevertheless, his request for the congregation was as true in his last years of ministry as it was in his first. Owen proclaimed, "Pray, pray for us; and God strengthen us, and our brother, who hath been called this day to the work! It may not be unuseful to him and me, to be mindful of these things, and to beg the assistance of our brethren" (9.462). Owen admitted his need with a cry of insufficiency, as he had done so regularly throughout his treatises on pastoral ministry (*Works*, 16.77, 89). But the example of his humility, paired with his comments on the duty of pastoral ministry provided for the listener then and the reader today an exemplary guide of how a pastor may best attempt to pursue ministry faithfully in the tradition of the English Independent John Owen. ■

**In Brief:** An excerpt from James Ussher's Manuscript Sermon on 2 Corinthians 6:1, which he preached on October 20, 1651 [1650].

As the preacher labours, so the hearer must labour too.

1. Something must be done before you come to Church.

2. Something must be done at the time of the delivery of the Word.

3. Something must be done when you are gone home.

1. There must be preparatives: the ground must be fitted, and prepared before the seed be put in: I must have one eye to God: and another to my own heart.

As to God, I must do two things. 1. I must humble myself in prayer to Him for a blessing, that I may receive the Word to the salvation of my soul. 2. I must stir up my faith. 1. Prayer is a principal part of our preparation...What shall I pray for? 1. I must pray for the minister, that God would bless him in two things. 1. That he may deliver the Word reverently and soundly. 2. That God would direct him in the thing that I have most need to be told of.

2. I must pray to God to direct the preacher to meet with my corruptions: to open the impostume [abscess] in my heart: to cause me to hear that, that I would not hear. Men come easily to the Mass: for they say *missa non mordet* [the mass will not bite]. But the Word of God brings fire from Heaven. Psalm 141:5. "Let the righteous smite me, and that is a benefit, and let him reprove me, and it shall be a precious oil that shall not break my head." Here's the desire of a man that means to go to heaven, that the preacher may meet with the secret corruption that is within him: that he may preach against his darling sin, that lies in his bosom. A sin that a man is loath to meet withal, lest he should fall out with it.

Then for prayer, forget not yourselves but pray to God (that has His pulpit in heaven) to teach you.

2. Thou must look to thine own heart: thou must prepare the ground before the seed be put in. 1. By removing all hindrances of God's Word. 2. By

endeavouring to obtain all that may further it. 1. Thou must fall a weeding: thou must leave all worldly cares, and sinful affections: thou must not come hither with thy heart stuffed with those, but though must sever thyself: Proverbs 18:1. "For the desire thereof he will separate himself to seek it, and occupy himself in all wisdom." First there must be a desire of the heart and then he must separate himself. He must not have his hear filled with other things when he comes hither. Worldly thoughts are thorns that choke the Word. Jeremiah 4:[3-]4. "Break up the fallow ground, and sow not among the thorns: be circumcised to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, lest my wrath come forth like fire and burn that none can quench it." Ezekiel 33:30-31. "Thou son of man, the children of thy people, that talk of thee by the walls, and in the doors of houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother saying, 'Come I pray you and hear, what is the word that cometh from the Lord:' for they come unto thee, as the people useth to come: and my people sit as before thee, and hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouths they make jests, and their heart goeth after their covetousness." Let no worldly cares come with us to church.

Then leave sinful affections. Put off thy shoes when thou comest hither. Hast thou a sin that hast got thy heart? And rules thee? Thou must leave that when thou comes with a heart bemired, can this seed sown in the mire thrive? James 1:21. "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of maliciousness" (superfluity the excrement of nature) "and receive with meekness the word that is grafted in you, which is able to save your souls, and be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." 1 Peter. 2.1[-2]. "Wherefore laying aside all maliciousness, and all guile and dissimulation, and envy, and all evil speaking, as new borne babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

Transcribed by Harrison Perkins and edited to update spelling and for formatting of points and Scripture citations. The text is excerpted from the manuscript volume: Cambridge University Library MS Mm. 6.55, fol. 187r-187v (sermon on 2 Corinthians 6:1 dated October 20, 1651). Note: the date in the margin in the manuscript reads October 20, 1651, but the surrounding sermons date to 1650.■