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John Gill's

A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 2—Chapter 4

OF THE DUTIES OF MEMBERS OF CHURCHES TO THEIR PASTORS

As pastors of churches have a work to do, which is both honourable and useful; so there are duties incumbent on those who are under their care, with respect to them, for their work's sake. Though they are "nothing," with respect to God, to whom they owe all they have (1 Cor. 3:7), and with respect to the churches, they are theirs, for their use and service; yet they are not to be reckoned as nothing by them, and to be treated with contempt; "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ;" made such and put into the ministry by him, being furnished from him with gifts and graces for it, and as such, to be highly accounted of; and though they are not lords and masters in the family of God, yet they are stewards in it, the highest officers in the house of God; and therefore are to be accounted of as "stewards of the mysteries of God," having the secret and hidden things of God entrusted with them; the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, the sublime as well as plainer doctrines of the gospel, which they are to minister: and since it is given them of God to know them and make them known to others, they are worthy of respect on that account (1 Cor. 4:1). The various duties which members of churches are under obligation to perform to their respective ministers, pastors, and elders, will be considered farther as they lie in various passages of scripture.

1. First, in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13, "We beseech you brethren to know them," &c.

1a. First, it is the duty of church members to know their pastors; which is not to be understood of a bare knowledge of their persons; for it cannot be supposed, that there can be such a relation between pastors and members, and yet the members not know their pastors; the sheep know their shepherd and his voice.

1a1. To know them is to be acquainted with them; to make themselves and their cases known unto them; for sometimes to "know" signifies to make known; as in 1 Corinthians 2:2. Members of churches should freely converse with their pastors, and make known the state and condition of their souls; and especially when they have any matter of difficulty and cases of conscience to be resolved, or are in any soul trouble and distress; they should open their minds to them, and declare their case, that they may speak a word in season to them; for though their cases may sometimes be hit upon and reached in the general ministry of the word, yet this is owing to an extraordinary direction of providence, and cannot in common be expected by all; at least it cannot be assured of, unless persons unbosom themselves to their ministers, and tell them their case.

1a2. To know them is to acknowledge them as their ministers and pastors. Not to know is not to own and acknowledge; as in Luke 13:27. It is for members so to know their pastors, as to own them as such; as theirs in a peculiar sense, in which other ministers are not; as in a special relation to them, and under their particular care; and this acknowledgment of them should be testified by their submission to them in their ministerial services and pastoral acts; of which more hereafter.

1a3. To know them is to take notice of them, to show respect to them, to "hold such in reputation," as the apostle advises (Phil. 2:29), to give them the honour that is due unto them; not to know Christ, his ministers, and his people, is to despise them, and to treat them in a disrespectful manner (1 John 3:1; Luke 10:16).

1a4. To know them is to love them; for words of knowledge oftentimes connote love and affection (2 Tim. 2:19), and so the apostle explains this of members knowing their pastors, by esteeming them "very highly in love," (2 Tim. 2:13) such as the Galatians expressed to the apostle Paul, though they afterwards became cool and indifferent to him; yea, the reverse of their former love.

1a5. To know them is to show a concern for their comfort and welfare, their safety and protection (Ps. 142:4) people should be concerned for the safety of their minister in the discharge of his office; to protect him from the insolent attempts of wicked men, that he may be with them without fear, while he ministers to them; as the apostle exhorted the Corinthians, with respect to Timothy (1 Cor. 16:10), and they should be careful to preserve his credit and reputation, and defend his character from the false aspersions of men, and not surlier, even among themselves, anything to be whispered to his discredit, and to the hurt of his usefulness; nor any accusation to be brought in public against him, without sufficient evidence (1 Tim. 5:19).

Now the arguments and reasons made use of to enforce this duty are,

1a5a. Because such persons "laboured among them;" they were not non-residents, but were upon the spot where the people were, they had the care of; as the flock was among them they were to feed, so they were among the flock, resided in the midst of

them, or near them; for where should pastors be, but with their flocks, to feed them they have the oversight of? (1 Peter 5:2) and faithful ministers are not only among their people, and continue with them, but they "labour" among them; they are not loiterers, slothful servants, who hide their talents in a napkin, and may be called idle shepherds, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber, who serve not the Lord Jesus, nor the souls of men, but their own bellies: but faithful ministers are labourers, labour in the word and doctrine, and so are worthy of double honour.

1a5b. Because they are "over" the churches to whom they minister; they are set in the first and most eminent place in the church, and have the rule over the members of it; and this superiority over them "is in the Lord," in things pertaining to his interest and glory; not in civil, but spiritual things; and though they are over the churches, yet under Christ the Lord, as Head of the church and King of saints; and they are governors in and by his appointment, and therefore are to be regarded.

1a5c. They "admonish" the saints, with whom they are concerned, or "put them in mind," as the word signifies; of their former experiences, which are delightful and refreshing, to them; and of the doctrines of the gospel they have been instructed in, and have received, and are food to their souls; and of the duties of religion, which are incumbent upon them, the observance of which makes for their peace and good, and for the glory of God: and they admonish, warn, rebuke, and reprove; they warn of approaching danger from their spiritual enemies, sin, Satan, and the world; and rebuke and reprove for errors and immoralities they may fall into, for the recovery of them. On all which accounts they are deserving of respect.

1b. Secondly, it is the duty of church members not only to know their pastors; but "to esteem them very highly in love for their work sake," or "superabundantly", as the word signifies; over and above common esteem and affection, and above common Christians, in honour preferring them to others; they are to think highly of them, and entertain a high opinion of them, of their grace, gifts, and abilities for their work; for if they think meanly, and entertain a contemptible opinion of them, their ministry is not likely to be of much use unto them: and they should speak very highly and very honourably of them; for if members of churches do not speak well of their own pastors, it can hardly be thought they should have much respect and esteem from others; and they should speak respectfully to them, with a becoming decency, considering the character they bear, and the high office they are in, in the church: and this esteem must be cordial and affectionate, it must be "in love;" not through fear, nor in dissimulation and hypocrisy, but in sincerity and truth; and that, "for their work sake," which is laborious, attended with weariness of body; and sometimes, through it, are "nigh unto" death, as Epaphroditus was (Phil. 2:30), and which also exposes to the reproach and contempt of the world. To which may be added, that it is, notwithstanding, a good work and honourable, and very beneficial to the souls of men; and therefore those employed in it, should be esteemed for the sake of it; for the work that they have done, in which they have been useful to men for conversion, or for comfort and edification; and forasmuch as they have

continued in it, and may be more useful in their day and generation, both for the good of souls and the glory of God.

2. Secondly, other branches of the duty of members to their pastors are expressed in Hebrews 13:7, 17, 18.

2a. First, in Hebrews 13:7 "Remember them," &c.

2a1. They should remember them, be mindful of them at the throne of grace, as is after exhorted to; should remember the doctrines preached by them, and treasure them up in their minds; which may be of after use to them; these they should carefully retain in their memories, and not let them slip from them; they should remember to give them the honour and respect that is due unto them, and to make a suitable provision for the outward supply of life. The reasons enforcing this exhortation are, because they "have the rule over them;" being appointed by Christ, the Head and King of the church, to govern them under him; not in a lordly manner, according to their own wills; but according to the laws and rules which Christ has given; and when they rule according to these, they rule well, and are worthy of double honour: the words may be rendered, who are "your guides or leaders"[\[3\]](#). Now such are the ministers of the gospel; they are the happy instruments of guiding men into the understanding of the scriptures; and of leading, under a divine direction and blessing, into the truths of the gospel; and of pointing out to them the way of life, peace, and salvation by Christ; and of directing them into the paths of faith and holiness, and are examples to them, and therefore deserve to be remembered by them. And moreover, they are said to "have spoken to them the word of God," the scriptures, given by inspiration of God, which contain his mind and will, and the doctrines which declare his grace and favour to the sons of men; these they explain truly and faithfully, according to the best light and knowledge they have; and deliver out the doctrines of them with great freedom, boldness, and fidelity: and their memory, on these accounts, is and should be blessed to truly gracious souls.

2a2. Their "faith" is to be "followed," or imitated; either their faithfulness in the several parts of their ministrations; or the grace of faith, their strong exercise of it, and the fruits and effects of it; or their profession of faith they hold fast without wavering; or the doctrine of faith they preach, by embracing it, abiding by it, standing fast in it, and persevering therein to the end: the motive to it is, "considering the end of their conversation;" either the drift and scope of it, which, as in connection with the following verse, is Christ, his honour and glory, who is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever;" or the whole of their conduct in the discharge of the various duties of their office, and the manner of it; or else the issue of it in death; or the good end which, through the grace of God, they make; and which is to be considered for imitation and encouragement.

2b. Secondly, what is further observed in Hebrews 13:17 "Obey them that have the rule over you," &c. This respects duties to be performed to the same persons who are described as before, as their leaders, guides, and governors; to whom,

2b1. Obedience is to be yielded; "Obey them": which obedience, in members of churches, to their pastors, lies,

2b1a. In a due regard to the ministry of the word by them; which regard to it is seen in a diligent and constant attendance on it; for if their pastors are to be diligent and constant in their work, they are to be as diligent and constant in attending upon them in it; if ministers are to preach the word in season and out of season, or as often as they have opportunity for it, then members should as frequently assemble to hear it: they show their obedience to the word, and to ministers in dispensing it, by their receiving it in faith and love; which they do when they receive it, not as the word of man, but as of God and Christ when they mix it with faith as they hear it, and receive the love of it. Indeed, none are obliged to receive and obey their word or doctrine, than as it appears to be agreeable to the sacred scriptures, which are to be searched diligently, as our Lord directs, and as the noble Bereans did, to see whether these things be so or not; every spirit is not to be believed, but to be tried, whether of God or not; and, indeed, everything delivered by pastors of churches is not binding on churches; nor are they obliged to receive it, but as it accords with the word of God.

2b1b. Obedience of members to their pastors lies in attendance on the ordinances of the gospel, as administered by them, and in joining with them constantly in the administration of them; not the ordinances of men; for they are not to be subject to ordinances of mens' invention, or which are after the commandments and doctrines of men; for then they would be the servants of men, auditor of Christ; but they are the ordinances of Christ, as they are faithfully administered by his servants, saints are to be subject to: the ministers of Christ are to teach all things Christ has commanded, and to urge the observance of them; and in this they are to be obeyed by those who are under their care, who, from a principle of love to Christ, should keep his commands, and constantly observe and attend his ordinances; but no farther are they obliged to follow their ministers, than as they are followers of Christ.

2b1c. Obedience of members of churches to their guides and governors, lies in regarding their admonitions, reproofs, and rebukes, whether in case of error or immorality, and whether in private or in public; and as their business is to admonish when needful, their admonitions should be well taken; as they are to speak, exhort, and rebuke with all authority, their authority should not be despised, but be submitted to: likewise their counsels and advice should be observed, and taken, and acted up to; especially if it appears to be founded on the word of God, and is consonant to it.

2b2. Another branch of the duty of church members to their pastors, is to "submit" themselves to them; that is, to the laws of Christ's house, as directed to and put into execution by them; and to their admonitions, reproofs, and censures, which are according to them; even though they may be not only public and before all, but sharp and severe, as the case may require. The reason given for such obedience and submission to them, is "because they watch for their souls;" not for the preservation of their bodies, and outward affairs; though if such who watch over these, to preserve them from hurt and damage in the night season, are to be regarded and valued, and obedience to be yielded to their alarms and directions, then much more those who watch for the good and welfare of immortal souls, which are of more worth than a world; their ministrations, in whatsoever way, are for comfort or edification, and are the instrumental means of saving souls: and what engages them to such watchfulness to preserve from error and heresy, from vice and immorality, is, that "they must give account;" to their own consciences, that they have discharged their work aright; to the church of God, to whom they are accountable if negligent; and especially to Christ, the Judge of all, to whom they must give an account of their ministry, and of the use of their talents, and of the souls put under their care, how they have discharged their duty towards them; and how such souls have behaved towards them under the ministry of the word and ordinances: and this they are desirous of doing "with joy, and not with grief;" either at the throne of grace, where they either rejoice or complain; or at the great day, when they will be witnesses either for or against those that have been committed to them; which latter would be "unprofitable" to them, and to the disadvantage of such who occasion grief and sorrow.

2c. Thirdly, another branch of duty in church members to their pastors, is suggested in Hebrews 13:18 "Pray for us," for us ministers; this is often inculcated in the sacred writings, as being of great moment and importance (see Eph. 6:19; Col. 4:3; 2 Thess. 3:1); and members of churches should be solicitous at the throne of grace for their ministers.

2c1. With respect to their private studies and preparation for their work; that they may be led to suitable subjects, and be furnished with suitable matter; that their understanding may be opened to understand the word; that they may be led into the depths and mysteries of the gospel; that their gifts may be increased; and that they may be diligent, industrious, and laborious in their work.

2c2. With respect to their public ministrations; that they may come forth richly fraught with gospel truths; that they may have freedom and utterance in the delivery of them; that they may speak them boldly, faithfully, and fully, as they ought to be spoken; and that their labours may be blessed to saints and sinners: and unless members of churches are observant of this their duty, they cannot expect the word will be blessed to them.

2c3. With respect to the world, and their conduct in it; that they may be kept from the evil of the world, that the ministry be not blamed; and from the temptations of

Satan, who has a peculiar spite against them; and that they may be delivered from evil and unreasonable men, who, as much as can be, endeavour to discourage them, and hinder them in their work; and they should pray for them, that they may neither be intimidated by the frowns of the world, nor allured by the flatteries of it; and they should pray for their temporal good, for their bodily health, and for the sparing of their lives for farther usefulness, and for every thing needful for them. This part of duty is enforced with the following reason; "For we trust we have a good conscience," exercised in an upright discharge of the ministerial work; "in all things, willing to live honestly;" not only as men, but as ministers, faithfully dispensing the word of truth; the temptations to the contrary being many, prayer is desired by them.

3. Thirdly, the duty of church members to their pastors, is held forth in various passages, respecting their maintenance, or a provision for the subsistence of themselves and families; which is part of that double honour a ruling elder and a laborious minister is worthy of, since "the labourer is worthy of his reward," (1 Tim. 5:17, 18) and he that is taught in the word, and instructed by it to his comfort and edification, should "communicate to him that teacheth in all good things," temporal good things he stands in need of (Gal. 6:6). This duty the apostle urges and presses with a variety of arguments, in 1 Corinthians 9:7-14 he argues from the law of nature and nations, exemplified in the cases of soldiers, planters of vineyards, and keepers of flocks, who, by virtue of their calling and service, have a right to a livelihood; between whom, and ministers of the gospel, there is a resemblance: also he argues from the law of Moses, particularly the law respecting the ox, not to be muzzled when it treads out the corn; which he interprets of ministers of the word, and applies it to them: he argues the right of the maintenance of the ministers of the gospel from the justice and equity of the thing; that since they minister spiritual things, it is but reasonable they should receive temporal ones: he makes this clear from the case of the priests and Levites under the legal dispensation, who ministering in holy things, had a provision made for them: and lastly, from the constitution and appointment of Christ himself, whose ordinance it is, that they that preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.

4. Fourthly, it is the duty of members of churches to adhere to their pastors, and abide by them in every condition and state, and in all cases and circumstances they come into; to support them under all their difficulties; to encourage them under all their discouragements; to sympathize with them in all their trials and troubles; to assist them all they can in their arduous work, against gainsayers, false teachers, and such as may rise up among themselves, speaking perverse things, and doing evil ones; the apostle Paul complains that all men forsook him in his troubles, and commends particularly Onesiphorus for his attachment to him and concern for him.

Now as there are duties belonging to the office of pastors, to be performed by them, and duties incumbent on members of churches towards them; on the performance of these mutual duties, the order, peace, good, and welfare of communities depend; and therefore should be strictly attended to, and religiously observed.

