

The Gospel Ministry



The Gospel Ministry

by THOMAS FOXCROFT

Preached at his ordination to the office
of pastor of a Boston church on
Wednesday, November 20, 1717

With a Preface by
Benjamin Wadsworth

Edited by Dr. Don Kistler



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Preface

BY BENJAMIN WADSWORTH

That the office and work of the gospel ministry is founded on divine institution may easily appear to those who read the Scriptures with serious, unbiased thought and observation. The right performance of this work is attended with many and great difficulties, partly from the various, frequent, furious assaults of Satan; partly from the lusts of men, variously discouraging or opposing it; and partly from the weaknesses and remaining corruptions of even the best of those who engage in it. Yet it is a work that is very honorable in itself, and of vast weight and importance. It must be thought so if we rightly consider that it is the infinitely great, glorious, holy, and heart-searching God who (in His providence) calls and commissions men to this work; that the main scope of the work is to batter down Satan's kingdom, to pull down the strongholds of lust in the hearts of men, to promote the glory of divine grace through Christ in sav-

ing men's precious, immortal souls, one of which is more worth than a world; and that those who engage in this work must give a strict account of their management to that God who employs them, who can't be deceived and won't be mocked, and who will require at their hands the blood of those souls who perish through their neglect, as well as graciously and abundantly reward them if they are faithful.

These brief hints show that the work of the gospel ministry is exceedingly great, weighty, and important. If the sense hereof made Paul to cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16). How much more might it make the ablest of ordinary ministers do so? A great variety of gifts and endowments (not to be obtained without a course of intense, laborious study and prayer), deep humility of mind, unfainting application, and unshaken resolution, and unwearied supplies and fresh anointings from Christ are needful to a right discharge of the work of the ministry. These things should be seriously considered by those who think of engaging in that most weighty work, so that they may enter upon it with due preparations of soul and dependence on God. They should gladly use such helps as tend to fit them for and quicken them to a right discharge of their duty.

Among such helps the following sermon may well be numbered. It was preached by the worthy author on the

day of his ordination, and is now published in answer to importunate solicitations. This importunity does not argue his backwardness to oblige friends, but his modest opinion of his own performances, and his unwillingness to appear so early in print (being very young), lest any should censure him for too much forwardness. Such a censure in this case would be very groundless. His principal design in studying this sermon was not so much instructing others in the work of the ministry, for, as he declares, he learned more clearly his own duty, and got the sense of it more deeply impressed on his own mind. Now that it is published, I wish others may benefit from reading it as much as he did in studying it.

Those sermons which are most worthy of commendation have little or no need of it; they commend themselves. I think this may be numbered among such. I am sure that the things contained herein are highly worthy of the deepest and most serious consideration by all gospel ministers. I hope by perusing it that I am more humbly sensible of my own deficiencies than I was before; my desire is that for the future I may be quickened to act in my station more agreeably to what is here very solidly and cogently inculcated.

I wish that all ministers would make it their chief business to preach Christ, to show men their need of Him, and His suitableness and sufficiency for them,

endeavoring that they may be rightly acquainted with Him, united to Him, and more conformed in heart and life to His image, precepts, and example. To thus preach Christ is the duty and honor of ministers more than to show the greatest learning in other matters, or to get the greatest applause. I esteem it a rich mercy of God to our land that He continues to smile on our college [Harvard], and thence sends forth from time to time able ministers to serve His holy churches in this wilderness, as well as in some other places. Praise be to God, the Father of lights, for this great blessing. This is the distinguishing glory of New England, wherein it differs from all other plantations and dispersions of the British Empire. I pray that God will continue to make our college a rich blessing to His churches as long as the sun and moon endure.

I esteem it as a rich blessing to that flock of our Lord Jesus, of which I am an unworthy pastor, that the worthy author of this sermon (my dear brother and fellow laborer), was so unanimously and peaceably called to and settled in the pastoral office among them. I pray that God will long continue his life and health, and greatly and constantly increase the gifts and graces of His good Spirit to him. I pray that God will make him very faithful and successful in the weighty and important work he is engaged in, and then will take him safe, after many years, to His heavenly kingdom.

As for the flock themselves, I pray that they may be a blessing and a comfort to those who watch for their souls. My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved, so that those who preach and those who hear may meet with joy at Christ's right hand on the Great Day.

Introduction

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

COLOSSIANS 1:28–29

Forasmuch as it has pleased the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, whose are all our ways and who turns the hearts of men as the rivers of water, to direct and incline His people in this flock (which He has purchased of old, whose goings are seen in this holy mountain) to elect and invite me—who is less than the least of all saints and not worthy to be allowed to be put in trust with the gospel—to take the ministerial charge and oversight of them in the Lord; and forasmuch as now the set and solemn time has come for my public investiture by prayer, with laying on of the hands of the presbytery into the sacred office whereunto He has called me, and unto which I would in all humility and fear, under a sense of the greatness of the work,

and conscious of my own insufficiency, in hope of the promised divine presence, with utmost sincerity, bind myself in the Lord before many witnesses; I would learn my duty, move my affections, and take encouragement from the passage of Scripture before us.

The verses we read are the words of the Apostle Paul; and herein he has left a bright specimen of his own conduct for direction and incentive unto ministers in the service of the gospel, and which therefore will afford reflections which are seasonable for the present solemnity.

I shall not spend any of the few minutes allotted for this discourse in stating the coherence and relation of the words to the context, but will immediately form some proper remarks upon them under a more abstract consideration. I trust that none will pervert or transfer those things, which I design for immediate caution to myself, as charges or personal imputations on any other person; and thus none will now look upon me as standing here this day to dictate and prescribe unto others so much as to myself.