

The Christian Pastor's Manual

The Christian Pastor's Manual

A Selection of Tracts on the Duties, Difficulties,
and Encouragements of the Christian Ministry

Compiled by
John Brown of Edinburgh

Edited by Don Kistler



Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Reformation Heritage Books

3070 29th St. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

616-977-0889

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

The Christian Pastor's Manual was first published in 1826.
This edition, in which spelling, grammar, and formatting
changes have been made, is © 2003.

Reprint 2022

ISBN 978-1-60178-969-3

*For additional Reformed literature, request a free book list from
Reformation Heritage Books at the above regular or email address.*

Contents

The Evil and Danger of Neglecting Souls Dr. Phillip Doddridge	1
Preaching Christ Rev. John Jennings	34
Particular and Experimental Preaching Rev. John Jennings	49
Pastoral Cautions Rev. Abraham Booth	66
The Qualifications Necessary for Teachers of Christianity Dr. John Erskine	105
Ministers of the Gospel Cautioned against Giving Offense Dr. John Erskine	148
Difficulties of the Pastoral Office Dr. John Erskine	185
Rules for the Preacher's Conduct Dr. Isaac Watts	207
Directions to the Student and the Pastor Rev. John Mason	256

The Character and Duty of a Christian Preacher	343
Rev. David Bostwick	
A Letter on the Propriety of a Ministerial Address to the Unconverted	374
Rev. John Newton	
Thoughts on 1 Timothy 4:13	382
Rev. Thomas Scott	
The Snares and Difficulties Attending the Ministry of the Gospel	392
Rev. John Newton	
Remarks on Subjects Connected with the Christian Ministry	399
Rev. Richard Cecil	
Questions Proper for Young Ministers Frequently to Put to Themselves	415
Dr. Isaac Watts	

The Evil and Danger of Neglecting Souls

by
Dr. Phillip Doddridge

“If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, ‘Behold, we knew it not,’ doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it? And He that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? And shall not He render to every man according to his works?”

Proverbs 24:11–12

For the explication of these words, I would offer three plain and obvious remarks:

1. The omission which is here charged as so displeasing to God, though immediately referring to men’s natural lives, must surely imply that the neglect of their souls is much more criminal. The text strongly implies that we shall be exposed to guilt and condemnation before God by forbearing to deliver those who are drawn unto death and those who are ready to be slain. This must directly refer to innocent persons, brought into visible and extreme danger by some oppressive enemy either by the sudden assault of a private person or by some unjust prosecution under forms of law; it may particularly extend to cases where we have reason to believe that a capital sentence has been passed, in consequence of false witness, detected before execution is done. It was allowed among the Jews that if

any person could offer anything in favor of a prisoner after sentence was passed, he might be heard before execution was done; and therefore it was usual (as the Mishnah says) that when a man was led to execution, a crier went before him and proclaimed, "This man is now going to be executed for such a crime, and such and such are witnesses against him; whoever knows him to be innocent, let him come forth and make it appear." And if the neglect of that is (as you see it is) represented as highly criminal, it must be a much more heinous crime, by any neglect of ours, to permit the ruin of men's souls without endeavoring after their recovery when they are, as it were, drawn away to the extreme danger of eternal death, and are ready to be slain by the sword of divine justice.

2. The text seems to suppose that men would be ready to excuse themselves for this neglect. It is true indeed that at the first sight of a miserable object we naturally find a strong impulse to endeavor to relieve it. Our hearts, as it were, spring in our bosoms and urge us forward to exert ourselves on such an occasion, which seems to be intimated by that word which we render "forbear," which often signifies to check, restrain, and hold back a person from what he is eager to do; but the wise man intimates that there may be danger of suppressing these generous impulses of the soul on the first view of the object, of suffering our charity to cool, and then of searching out apologies for our inactivity. You may be ready to say, "Behold, I knew it not. I did not particularly see the danger. I did not, however, apprehend it to be so extreme; or, I did not know the innocence of the person in danger; or, if I did believe it, I knew not how to deliver him. I did not think the

interposition of such a person as myself could be of any importance in such an affair. I was sorry to see innocence overborne and weakness oppressed, but I was myself too weak to contend with the mightier oppressor; too poor, too ignorant, or too busy to meddle in an affair where those who were much my superiors were concerned, and had determined the case. I had no obligation to the person in danger. I had no concern with him nor anything to do to embarrass myself with his affairs." If these excuses are just, it is well.

3. Nevertheless, the text supposes that these excuses might often be overruled by an appeal to men's consciences, as in the sight of God. "Doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it?" It is as if he had said, "It is an easy thing to excuse omissions so that a fellow creature shall have nothing to reply; but whoever you are who reads these words, I charge you to remember that it is comparatively a very little matter to be judged of man's judgment. He who judges you is the Lord; it is He who ponders the heart. He weighs in a most accurate balance all its most secret sentiments. I therefore cut off all chicane and trifling debate at once by placing you in His presence, and laying open your conscience there. You can answer me, but can you answer the heart-searching God?"

"Does not He, the great Father of spirits, see in every instance how inferior spirits conduct themselves? Does He not precisely know the situation in which your heart was at the very moment in question? You say that you did not know it, but He is witness whether you indeed did or did not know it. And He also sees all the opportunities and advantages which you had to know it, all the hints which might have been traced out to

open a more explicit and particular knowledge, every glimpse which you had when you were (like the priest, when he spied at a distance the wounded traveler) passing by on the other side, and perhaps affecting to look the contrary way."

Nor was it in vain that the wise man renewed his expostulation in a different form: "He that keepeth thy soul, doth not He know it?" It is as if he had said, "Consider God as keeping your own soul, as holding it in life, as preserving your spirit by His continued visitation. Oh, you who neglect the life of your brother, must He not be highly displeased with that neglect? May He not reasonably expect that while He, the Lord of Heaven and earth, condescends to become your guardian, you should learn from Him, and be according to your ability and in your sphere, a guardian to the whole human race, and should endeavor, in every instance, to ward off danger from the life, from the soul of your brother!"

And that these thoughts may enter into your mind with all their weight, it is added once more in this pointed form of interrogation, "Will not He render to every man according to his works?" I appeal to your own heart, is He not a being of infinite moral as well as natural perfections? And will He not, as the Judge of all the earth, do right? Would He not have remembered and rewarded your generous care for the preservation of the miserable creature in question? And, on the other hand, will He not reckon with you for such a failure? Human laws, indeed, cannot punish such neglects; but the supreme Legislator can and will do it. Think of these things, and guard against such fatal negligence in every future instance. Think of them,

and humble yourself deeply before God for every past instance in which such guilt has been incurred.

God is my witness that I do not mean to insinuate the least disrespectful thought with regard to any one of you. Nevertheless, permit me to say without offense (for I say it in the fear of God, and with the sincerest deference and friendship to you) that I am afraid that the extensive and important obligations of the ministerial office are not generally considered and remembered among us as they ought to be. I apprehend that much more might be done for the honor of God and the good of souls than is commonly done, even by those who, in the main, have a principle of true religion in their hearts; by those who keep up the exercise of public worship in a regular and honorable manner, and appear not only irreproachable in their conversation, but, if considered as in private life, bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. The learned, the wise, the virtuous, the pious minister is, I hear, often negligent of a considerable part of his trust and charge, and thereby fails to deliver, as he might, those who are drawn unto death, and perhaps are just ready to be slain.

To awaken our spirits, therefore, from that insensibility, in this respect, into which they are so ready to fall, I shall take the liberty briefly to consider what excuses we may be most ready to offer for neglecting the souls of men. Second, I will seriously represent the great evil of that neglect in the sight of God, notwithstanding all those excuses. After that I shall add a few hints, by way of reflection, as time permits.

I shall first consider what excuses we may be ready to make for neglecting to do our utmost for the salvation

of men's souls.

1. We must do something considerable for that purpose. We must take care for their instruction in public, reading the Word of God to them when they are assembled together in His house, explaining and enforcing it in our expositions and sermons; presenting prayers and praise to God in their name, and, at proper seasons, administering the sacraments in such a manner as we judge most agreeable to the institution of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so far indeed it is well; and a most wise and gracious appointment of our blessed Redeemer it is that such ordinances should be administered on solemn stated days, and by men appropriated to that employment. In consequence of this, such knowledge is dispersed as is, through the divine blessing, effectual for the salvation of many souls. I am not afraid to say that this would make the Christian ministry, even in the hands of ignorant, careless, and vicious men, a blessing to the nation where it is settled, as long as reading the Scriptures, and almost any kind of prayers in an intelligible language, are a part of divine service in their assemblies. Much more will it be so in the hands of wise, sober, and religious men.

But while we are thus pleading our diligence and care in the administration of public ordinances, it will be kindness to ourselves seriously to ask our own hearts, at least, how they are administered. It is a very important trust to have the management of men's religious hours committed to us, their season of social worship being, comparatively, so short, and so infinitely momentous. I think that we almost, as it were, put our own lives in our hand while we undertake it, and

may justly tremble on the view of that awful account which we are to give of it.

I hope, sirs, we have the testimony of our own consciences before God that we do not, on these solemn occasions, content ourselves with cold essays on mere moral subjects, however acute, philosophical, or polite; nor that we make it our main business, in our sermons, to seek the ornament of elegant words, the refinements of criticism, or the nice arrangement of various complex and abstruse argumentations. When we speak in the name and presence of God to immortal creatures on the borders of eternity, I hope we entertain our hearers with plain, serious, and lively discourses on the important doctrines of Christianity, in their due connection and their relation to each other, in such a manner as we, on mature consideration, do verily believe may have the most effectual tendency to bring them to God through Christ, and to produce and promote in their hearts, through the divine blessing, the great work of regeneration and holiness. I hope and trust that God is our witness, and that the people of our charge are witnesses, that not one of those who diligently attend on our ministry, though but for a few succeeding Sabbaths, can fail to learn the way of salvation as exhibited in the gospel; that we speak of it as those who are in earnest and do, from our very souls, desire to answer the great ends of our ministry in the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, and in the eternal happiness of those invaluable souls whom He has committed to our care. Otherwise we may incur great and fatal guilt, though public worship may be constantly and decently carried on, and though a reasonable proportion of time is employed in it, with numerous and attentive

auditories, to whom we may be as the lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, while in the ears of God, for want of that fervent charity which should dictate and animate all, we are but as sounding brass or as a tinkling cymbal.

But granting, as I would willingly suppose, and as with relation to you, my brethren, I do firmly believe that all these reflections can be answered with satisfaction—here is indeed a part of your duty honorably formed, and an important part of it too—but is that part, though ever so important, to be substituted for the whole? The diligent inspection of our flock, pastoral visits, the observation of the religious state of families, personal exhortations, admonitions, and cautions by word or letter, as prudence shall direct, catechizing children, promoting religious associations among the younger and the elder people of our charge, and the strict and resolute exercise of discipline in the various churches over which we preside—are these not parts of our office? Will we say it with our dying breath? Will we maintain before the tribunal of Christ that they did not belong to the Christian ministry? And, if not, will our care of other parts of it be allowed as sufficient excuse before Him for our total omission of these? We have preached and prayed and administered the sacraments. These things we should indeed have done; and when we had taken the care of congregations upon us, we could hardly avoid it. But surely our own conscience will, now or hereafter, tell us that we ought not to have left the others undone.

2. But we may, perhaps, for a while elude the conviction by pleading that the care of particular persons more properly belongs to others, and especially to

heads of families, who have more opportunities of being serviceable to those under their charge, and indeed have the most immediate concern for them. It certainly does. But does it belong to them alone? Or if it did, do not they belong to us and to our care? And is it not the part of every superior officer of a society to see to it that the subaltern officers are careful and diligent in the discharge of their duty? And in this case, are we to take it for granted that, in our respective congregations, heads of families are so diligent automatically that they pray in their families; that they read the Scriptures and other good books there, especially on the evening of the Lord's day; that they catechize their children and solemnly press upon them, and upon their servants, the serious care of practical religion? Are we to conclude without any further inquiry that all this is done, and done in so diligent and so prudent a manner that there is no need of any particular exhortations, instructions, or admonitions from us? Would to God there were any one congregation in the whole kingdom of which this might reasonably be presumed to be the case! But if it were indeed so, would not our concurrence with these wise and pious heads of families, in so good but so difficult a work, encourage and strengthen them to prosecute it with greater cheerfulness and vigor? Would it not quicken both their cares and their endeavors? And might it not, by the divine blessing, promote the success of them? Might it not gain on the minds of children and servants to see that we do not think it beneath us to tenderly care for their souls? And might not our tender and condescending regards to them in private, by convincing them how well we mean them, render our public labors more acceptable and useful to them?

Now, we well know that the children and servants of the present generation are the hopes of the next, as they are probably those who, in their turns, will be parents and governors of families whose children and servants, when they arise, will in one way or another feel the happy or unhappy consequences of our fidelity or neglect.

3. And when such affairs are in question, shall we allow ourselves to plead that we have so much other business, and such various engagements of a different kind, that we cannot possibly attend to these things? But give me leave, my brethren, to observe that the question here is not whether we can find out other agreeable ways of filling up our time, but whether those other ways are more important, and whether that different manner of employing it is more acceptable in the sight of God, and will turn to a better account in that great day when our conduct is to be finally reviewed by Him. We must indeed have our seasons of recreation, and our seasons of study; but it will easily appear that no regards to either of these will vindicate or excuse our neglect of the private duties we owe to our flock in giving diligence to know their state, and in being careful to teach them not only publicly, but from house to house.

Recreation, to be sure, can afford no just apology for neglecting this duty since to follow this employment prudently might be made a kind of recreation from the labors of a sedentary and studious life. "A grave and sincere recreation!" you will perhaps say. Grave indeed I will acknowledge it to be, but not therefore, to a serious mind, less delightful. So much of those two noblest and sweetest exercises of the soul, devotion and benevo-

lence, would naturally mingle with these pious cares and tender addresses as would renew the strength which had been exhausted in our studious hours, and the manly, shall I say, or rather the God-like joy it would administer would quite discountenance that which we find in the gay indulgences of a humorous and facetious conversation—though I see no necessity of forbidding that at proper intervals, so far as its cheerfulness is consistent with wisdom and religion. And I am sure that if we can turn our seasons of recess from study to so profitable an account as would be answered by the duties which you know I have now in view, it will be a most happy art, well becoming one who is truly prudent, and would therefore husband his time to the best purposes for eternity. In this view, it is evident that the smallest fragments of it, like the dust of gold, are too valuable to be lost.

The greatest portion of time to be given to our studies will, no doubt, be urged as a yet more material excuse; but here it is obvious to reply that a prudent care in the duties I am now recommending is very consistent with our employing a great deal of time in study, and particularly with our giving it what I hope we shall always learn to value and redeem, namely our morning hours, to which some of the evening may also be added. And if these will not generally suffice, give me leave to ask, what are those important studies that would thus engross the whole of our time, excepting what is given to devotion and to what is generally called recreation?

I have had some little taste of the pleasures of literature myself, and have some reason to hope I shall not be suspected of any prejudice against it; nor am I at all inclined to pass those contemptuous censures on the

various branches of it in which ignorance and sloth are often, with strange stupidity, or with yet stranger assurance, seeking—and, it may be, finding—a refuge; but on such an occasion I must freely say that I fear many things, which employ a very large portion of our retired time, are studied as rather polite amusements to our own minds than as things which seem to have any apparent subservience to the glory of God and the edification of our flock. Consequently, I fear, they will stand as articles of abatement, if I may so express it, in our final account; and, when they come to be made manifest, they will be found works that shall be burned, as being no better, in the divine esteem, than wood, hay, and stubble, however beautifully they may have been varnished or gilded over.

Let me here, in particular, address myself to my younger brethren, with a frankness which may be to them more excusable, while I urge them to a Christian self-denial in this area, where perhaps it may be, of all others, the most difficult. I do not apprehend persons of your approved character to be in danger of any other kind of luxury or intemperance; but there is, if you will permit me so to call it, a sort of refined, intellectual luxury, with regard to which I am jealous over you, lest you should be seduced into it, or, rather, lest some of you be already ensnared by its specious charms.

I would not, my young friends, be so severe and cruel as to desire that you be denied that high and elegant entertainment which a person of genius and taste will find in the masterly writings of the ancient orators, historians, and poets, or in those polite and elegant pieces which our own and other modern languages may afford, from which the wise man and the Christian

will learn many things of solid use, as well as matters of most delightful amusements. Neither would I pretend to forbid some mathematical and philosophical researches into which you are initiated in your academic course, and with which you will do well to retain and improve your acquaintance in the progress of life, both to strengthen your rational faculties by that strenuous exercise and to improve your knowledge of the works of God. These will appear great, wonderful, and delightful in proportion to the degree of sagacity and diligence with which they may be searched out; but it is one thing to taste of these poignant and luscious fruits, and another to feed and live upon them; one thing to make the most noble and substantial parts of them our entertainment and refreshment, and quite another to make their circumstantial curiosities the chief business of our study, and the favorite subjects of our most attentive inquiry. That true greatness and elevation of mind which the gospel is so admirably calculated to produce would teach us a much sublimer science; and if, for the sake of these little things, we neglect to pray for those whom God has committed to our care, to inquire into their religious state, and to pursue them with suitable applications and addresses, the time will come when we shall assuredly own that we dearly purchased the most refined pleasures they could possibly give us—not to say how much greater and nobler pleasure we even now give up while our duty is neglected.

Oh, my brethren, let us consider how fast we are passing through this dying life which God has assigned us, in which we are to manage concerns of infinite moment; how fast we are passing on to the immediate presence of our Lord, to give our account to Him.

You must judge for yourselves, but permit me to say that, for my own part, I would not, for ten thousand worlds, be that man who, when God shall ask him at last how he has employed most of his time while he continued as a minister in His church and had the care of souls, should be obliged to reply, "Lord, I have restored many corrupted passages in the ancient classics, and illustrated many which were before obscure. I have cleared up many intricacies in chronology or geography; I have solved many perplexed cases in algebra; I have refined astronomical calculations and left behind me many sheets on these curious and difficult subjects, where the figures and characters are ranged with the greatest exactness of truth. These are the employments in which my life has been worn out, while preparations for the pulpit, or ministering in it, did not demand any immediate attendance." Oh, sirs, as for the waters which are drawn from these springs, however sweetly they may taste to a curious mind that thirsts for them, or to an ambitious mind which thirsts for the applause they sometimes procure, I fear there is often reason to pour them out before the Lord with rivers of penitential tears, like the blood of souls which have been forgotten while these trifles have been remembered and pursued.

Nor am I without my fears that a great deal of studious time is lost in an overly artful composition of sermons, and in giving them such polish and ornament as does not conduce to their usefulness, nor in any way balance the labor employed in the work. If we do not diligently watch over our hearts, this will be an incense offered to our own vanity, which will render our sacrifice less acceptable to God, however we and