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SERMONS AND TRACTS OF JOHN GILL **THE GOSPEL MINISTER**

The Work Of A Gospel-Minister **Recommended to Consideration**

2 TIMOTHY 2:7

by John Gill

(London: George Keith, 1764)

*Thou hast given a standard to them that fear thee;
that it may be displayed because of the truth*

— Psalm 60:4

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SERMON 72

THE WORK OF A GOSPEL-MINISTER RECOMMENDED TO CONSIDERATION

A Charge Delivered At The Ordinations Of The Reverend

MR. JOHN GILL,
MR. BONNER STONE,
MR. JAMES LARWILL,
MR. ISAAC GOULD,
MR. WALTER RICHARDS.

~~SERMON~~ 2 TIMOTHY 2:7

*Consider what I say, and the Lord give
thee understanding in all things.*

That part of the service of this day, which is assigned to me, being to give a word of exhortation to the pastor of this church, now appointed and ordained to that office, and invested with it; I have chosen to do it in the words of the text; in which may be observed,

I. An exhortation of the apostle Paul to Timothy, to *consider* what he had said, was saying, or about to say to him; to attend to it, revolve it in his mind, and lay it up in his memory.

II. A prayer, or wish for him, that the Lord would give him understanding, in all that was, or should be said; and in everything else that might be serviceable and useful to him.

I. *An exhortation to consider well what had been, or should be said unto him;* for it may refer both to what goes before, and to what follows after; to what goes before, to the advice given to *be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*; to have recourse to Christ for gifts and grace to fit him more and more for his work, and carry him through it; and strongly to believe that there is a fullness of them in Christ, and that he should receive a sufficient supply from him to help him in every time of need; and also to

the instructions delivered to him, to commit the doctrines of the gospel he had heard of him to faithful men, and such as were of capacity to teach others; and likewise to the characters he himself bore, as a soldier, a soldier of Jesus Christ, a good soldier of his; and therefore should patiently and constantly endure hardships, reproaches, and persecution, for the sake of him and his gospel; and should not unnecessarily entangle himself with the affairs of this life, but attend to military ones, that so he might please him that had chosen him to be a soldier; and as he was a combatant, that he must not expect the crown, unless he strove lawfully; and as a husbandman, bearing the precious seed of the word, that he must labor before he could partake of the fruits of it: or this may have respect to what follows after; that he would consider the sum and substance of the gospel he was to preach, and for which the apostle suffered, which was a risen Savior, and includes his incarnation, obedience, sufferings, and death, with all the doctrines of grace in connection with them; as also that it became him to be very studious and diligent in the use of means, that he might acquit himself with honor in the discharge of his ministerial work; that he might appear approved of God, a workman not to be ashamed of his work, at all times rightly dividing the word of truth, shunning every thing contrary to faith and holiness; likewise, that he ought to *flee youthful lusts*, his age inclined unto, and *follow righteousness, faith, charity and peace*; and *meekly to instruct* those who contradicted themselves and their profession, that, if it was possible, they might be recovered out of the snare they were fallen into; to these this exhortation may refer, with other things that may be observed in the context. What farther improvement I shall make of it, will be to lay before you, the pastor of this church, for your consideration various things relative to the work you have been chosen, and called unto, and the office you have been invested with.

First, *Consider the work itself, and what a work it is you are engaged in.* It is a *work*, and not a *sine-cure*, but a service; there is business to be done, and a great deal of business too; it is called *the work of the ministry*, (~~4042~~ Ephesians 4:12.) from the subject-matter of it, the ministry of the word, and the administration of ordinances; and the *work of the Lord* and *of Christ*, (~~4100~~ 1 Corinthians 16:10. ~~3881~~ Philippians 2:30.) from the concern the Lord Jesus Christ has in it; he is the sum and substance of it, he calls unto it, and qualifies for it, assists in it, and when it is rightly done, it makes for his glory. Consider that it is a laborious work; ministers of Christ are not to be loiterers, but laborers in his vineyard; it requires much reading of

the scriptures, frequent prayer; constant meditation, and study to prepare for it; *and much study is a weariness to the flesh*: (^{<2122>}Ecclesiastes 12:12.) and in the performance of this service, with that zeal, fervor, and affection, which are necessary to it, a man, to use the apostle's phrase, *may spend and be spent*; (^{<4725>}2 Corinthians 12:15.) spend his animal spirits until they are quite exhausted and gone; for this work, followed with close application, will try the best constitution in the world, and at length waste and consume it: *Epaphroditus*, a faithful and laborious minister of the word, was *nigh unto death, for, or through the work of Christ*: (^{<5183>}Philippians 2:30.) but then consider, for your encouragement, it is an honorable work;

if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work:
(^{<5410>}1 Timothy 3:1.)

which is pleasantly, profitably, and honorably good; for what is more honorable than to be the servants of the most high God, and to be employed in such service of his, as *to shew unto men the way of salvation*? Than to be the ambassadors of Christ, and stand in his stead, and *beseech men to be reconciled to God*? Than to be *stewards of the mysteries of Christ, and of the manifold grace of God*? Than to be the lights of the world, stars in Christ's right hand, the messengers or angels of the churches, and the glory of Christ? Moreover, consider that this work well performed, is deferring of esteem from men;

they that labor in the word and doctrine are worthy of double honor, (^{<5457>}1 Timothy 5:17.)

of an honorable maintenance, and of honorable respect; they are to be received with gladness, and had in reputation; and to be known, owned, and acknowledged by those over whom they are as fathers, guides, and governors: and to be highly esteemed for their works sake: add to all this, that this is a work in which God is with his ministers, and they with him; for, says the apostle, (^{<4183>}1 Corinthians 3:9.)

we are laborers together with God, ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building;

the churches are God's husbandry, and to be manured and cultivated, planted and watered; which is a laborious work, and constantly to be attended to; and nothing can be done to any purpose, and with any effect, but through the presence and blessing of God; *neither is he that planteth*

any thing, neither he that watereth, which to do is the work of gospel-ministers, but God that giveth the increase; (~~<400>~~ 1 Corinthians 3:7.) and as the people of God, in a church-state, are his building, and who are to be edified and built upon their most holy faith;

except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it; (~~<400>~~ Psalm 127:1.)

but when his ministers go forth in his name and strength, preaching his gospel, and he grants his gracious presence and assistance, and he, *the Lord*, is *working with them*, (~~<400>~~ Mark 16:20.) they go on in their work with cheerfulness and success.

Secondly, *Consider the several parts of this work you are called unto and engaged in, which are to be performed by you, and are as follow;*

1. The ministration of the word, which is a principal part of the work of a minister of Christ; the apostles, and first preachers of the gospel, besides the spiritual, had the secular affairs of the church upon their hands; which lying too heavy on them, they desired to be eased, by appointing proper persons to take care of the latter; that so they might give themselves up wholly and constantly *to prayer, and to the ministry of the word:* (~~<400>~~ Acts 6:4.) Now consider what that is, that is to be ministered, it is the word of God, and not man; which, as it demands the attention of the hearer, so the assiduous application of the preacher: it is the gospel that is to be preached, the good news and glad tidings of peace, pardon, righteousness, and salvation by Christ; it is the gospel, which is given in commission to preach; it is the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which ministers are entrusted with; and there is a woe upon them, if they preach it not; they are appointed ministers of the new testament; not of the law, the killing letter, the ministration of condemnation and death; but of the gospel, the quickening spirit, the ministration of the spirit, of righteousness and of life: consider, that only the pure unmixed gospel of Christ is to be preached, the sincere milk of the word, unadulterated, and clear of all human mixtures; it is not to be blended and corrupted with the doctrines of men: the word of God is not to be handled craftily; the hidden things of dishonesty are to be renounced, and the manifestation of the truth is to be made to every man's conscience, in the fight of God: and the whole of the gospel is to be delivered; no truth of it is to be dropped, concealed, or kept back, upon any pretense whatsoever, though it may be displeasing to some; such a question is never to be admitted and reasoned upon one moment in your

private studies and preparations, whether such a truth you are meditating upon will be pleasing or displeasing? for if you seek to please men, you will not be the servant of Christ; the only thing to be considered is, is it truth? if it is, speak it out, without fear of man; and though it may be traduced as irrational, or licentious, and be loaded with reproach, and charged with dangerous consequences; yea, it may be urged, that admitting it to be truth, since an ill use may be made of it, it should not be preached; but let none of these things move you; preach truth, every truth, and leave it with the God of truth, who will take care of it, and use it to his own ends and purposes. Consider, that Christ is the sum and substance of the gospel-ministry; and that he, as to his person, offices, and grace, is chiefly to be insisted upon;

we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord;

(~~4016~~2 Corinthians 4:5.)

as the anointed prophet, priest, and king; as Jesus the alone Savior; as the Lord our righteousness, even *Christ crucified*, and slain for the sins of men; though such preaching may be *a stumbling-block* to some, and *foolishness to others*. (~~4023~~1 Corinthians 1:23.) The great apostle *Paul*, who well understood the nature and import of the gospel-ministry, declares, that *he determined not to know any thing*, that is, not to make known, or preach anything, *save Jesus Christ, and him crucified*; (~~4016~~1 Corinthians 2:2.) and as Christ is the alpha and omega of the scriptures, so he should be of all your discourses and sermons; whatever subject you are upon, keep Christ in your eye, and let it appear, some way or other, it has a connection with him, and centers in him. The gospel to be preached, is the gospel of the grace of God; and it is sometimes called the grace of God itself; the doctrines of it are the doctrines of free grace, and declare, that the salvation of men, from first to last, and in all the parts of it, is of grace, and not of works; and these are to be faithfully dispensed, as that the first step to the salvation of men, the choice of them to it, is of grace, and not of works; that men are justified freely by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and not by the works of the law; that the full forgiveness of sins, though by the blood of Christ, is according to the riches of God's grace; and that eternal life is the free gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord: Yea, every truth that is contained in the scriptures, and is agreeable to them, is to be preached; for *all scripture is profitable for doctrine*; (~~4016~~2 Timothy 3:16.) from thence it is to be fetched, and by it to be supported and maintained; this is the standard of faith and practice; and as it is by this the hearers of the word are to try what they hear, and

judge whether things are right or wrong, they hear; so this should be the rule to ministers to preach by;

to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. (~~2180~~ Isaiah 8:20.)

The doctrinal part of the scripture is more especially to be attended to, because that is the food with which the flock and church of God is to be fed, by those who are the pastors and overseers of it; and therefore, as they should take heed to themselves, and to the flock under their care, so to their doctrine; that it be found doctrine, pure, and incorrupt; that it be entirely agreeable to the sacred writings; that it be the doctrine of Christ, which comes from him, and is concerning him; that it be such as was preached by his apostles, and is contained in their discourses and epistles; and that it be according to godliness: though not the doctrines of the gospel only are to be preached, but the duties of religion are also to be inculcated in their proper place and course, and to be pressed on believers upon gospel principles and motives; the churches are to be taught to observe all things which Christ has commanded, every ordinance of his, and every duty enjoined, both with respect to God and men; saints are to be put in mind to be ready to every good work; and those that have believed in God, are to be charged to be careful to maintain good works for necessary uses; every doctrine and every duty, in their turns, are to be insisted on, throughout the circle of the evangelic ministry.

Let controversy, as little as may be, be brought into the pulpit; controversial sermons, when best managed, are generally unedifying ones to the people in common; tend to damp the true spirit of religion and devotion, which it is the design of preaching the word to excite; and serve to entangle, perplex, and confound weak minds; objections are often started to be solved, which are not easily done; by which means captious persons, and such as are disinclined to receive the truth, are furnished with them, who otherwise would not; and sometimes the solutions of such objections are not quite satisfactory to the friends of truth, and so rather tend to stagger than to establish: Upon the whole, it is best to preach the pure truths of the gospel in the plainest manner, and endeavor to illustrate and confirm them by scripture-testimonies, and by reasonings drawn from thence, and leave them with their native evidence upon the minds of men.

Now consider, that all this is to be done completely, constantly, and consistently; the gospel is to be preached *fully*, as it was by the apostle

Paul, (~~659~~ Romans 15:19.) according to the measure of the gift of grace given; and when a man preaches the whole gospel of Christ, and delivers out all the doctrines of it, and urges to all the duties relative to it, and declares the whole counsel of God; then may he be said to do the work of an evangelist, and to make full proof of his ministry, and to fulfill the ministry which he has received of Christ: and this is to be done constantly; *these things*, says the apostle, *I will that thou affirm constantly*; (~~688~~ Titus 3:8.) the truths, before spoken of, concerning the state of God's people in unregeneracy, the loving-kindness of God to them in their redemption by Christ, the saving them by the washing of regeneration, the justification of them by the free grace of God, and their heirship and title to eternal life, upon that; the word must be preached in season, and out of season, as often as opportunity offers; and the ministers of Christ must be *stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing their labor is not in vain in the Lord*: and care should be taken, that this work is done consistently; that the ministry is uniform, and all of a piece; that there is no contradiction, no yea and nay in it; otherwise great confusion will be created in the minds of hearers, and they will be thrown into the utmost perplexity, not knowing what to believe, or receive;

for if the trumpet given an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? (~~648~~ 1 Corinthians 14:8.)

2. Another part of the work to be performed by you, is the administration of gospel-ordinances, and they are principally Baptism and the Lord's supper: the administration of baptism goes along with the ministry of the word; such, who have a commission from Christ to *teach* and *instruct* men in divine things, have a commission also to *baptize* those who are taught and instructed by them, *in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the holy Ghost*; nor have any other a right to do it: some have thought that *Philip* who baptized the eunuch and others, was *Philip* the deacon; but be it so, he was an evangelist also, a preacher of the gospel, as it is plain he was; and therefore he baptized, not by virtue of his office as a deacon, but as a teacher and a preacher of the word of God. The apostle *Paul* indeed says,

Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel;
(~~617~~ 1 Corinthians 1:17.)

but then his meaning is, that he was not sent only to baptize, or this was not the principal part of his ministry; it was chiefly to preach the gospel,

though not to the exclusion of the administration of ordinances; nor does he say this, as thinking, or speaking meanly of the ordinance of baptism; but because some persons had made an ill use of their being baptized by him; and were ready to boast of it, as if they were baptized in his name. It is incumbent on you, to administer this ordinance to the persons which are described in the word of God, and of which there are examples in it, and in the manner therein directed to, and practiced. The ordinance of the Lord's supper, being an ordinance in the church, is to be administered by the pastor of it; such who break the bread of life in the ministry of the word, are to break the bread in the ordinance of the supper: the apostle *Paul* broke bread to the disciples, to whom he preached; and this ordinance is to be administered frequently, as is suggested in those words, *as often as ye eat this bread*, etc.; (~~4125~~ 1 Corinthians 11:26.) in it the sufferings of Christ should be described, and his love set forth in the most moving and pathetic strains; and he be represented as crucified and slain, in as lively a manner, as the administrator is capable of.

3. Another part of your work, is to take care of the discipline of the house of God; for though everything is to be done by the vote and suffrage of the church, the power of discipline being lodged in it by Christ, the head of it; yet the executive part of it will lie chiefly upon you; though none are to be admitted to, or excluded from the communion of the church, but according to its voice, and with its consent: yet it should be greatly your concern, to examine things closely, whether the persons are fit to be received or rejected; and to take care, that nothing be done through favor or affection, and with partiality. Pastors of churches have a rule and government committed to them; they are set over others in the Lord; they are not indeed to lord it over God's heritage, to rule them in an haughty and imperious manner, but according to the laws of Christ: which they are carefully to observe, and point out to the church, and see that they are put in execution; in doing which their government chiefly lies; you are therefore to take care, that everything in the church be done decently, and in order, and according to the rule of. the divine word: particularly, care should be taken that no case in difference, of a private nature, be brought into the church, before the rule is observed, which Christ has given in reference to such a case; that the offended brother should first tell the offender of his fault alone, and endeavor to convince him of it; and if he should not succeed, then to take one or two more, and try by them to bring him to an acknowledgment of it; but, if after all he is obstinate and

incorrigible, then bring it to the church. (~~CRIS~~ Matthew 18:15-17.) But as for those that *sin openly*, that are guilty of notorious and scandalous crimes, in a public manner, to the great disgrace of religion, as well as grief of the church, these are to be *rebuked before all*, without anymore to do, that *others may fear*: (~~SAB~~ 1 Timothy 5:20.) the several rules to be attended to, with respect to church-discipline, you are to inculcate to the church, at proper times, and on proper occasions; as to admonish persons guilty of immorality and error, to withdraw from those that *walk disorderly*, after all methods taken to reclaim them are vain and fruitless; and *to reject an heretic, after the first and second admonition*, (~~SAB~~ 2 Thessalonians 3:6, ~~SAB~~ Titus 3:10.) when without effect.

4. Another part of your work, is to visit the several members of the church, as their cases may require, especially when distressed, either in body or mind; then to pray with them, and for them, to speak a word of comfort to them, and give them your best counsel and advice; and this will introduce you into divers families; but take care not to meddle with family-affairs; what you hear and see in one family report it not in another; this may be attended with bad consequences: and whatever differences may arise between one and another, interfere as little as possible; choose rather that differences between members be composed by other persons, the officers of the church, than by you, that no prejudices be entertained against your ministry; and particularly be careful to avoid that scandalous practice, the disgrace of the pulpit, bringing matters of difference into it, whether between yourself or others, or whether between one member and another, one side of which you may incline to take; for why should the peace and edification of a whole community be destroyed, through the noise and din of private quarrels? As this is a practice exceeding mean, it is very unbecoming the gospel of peace, and the ministers of it. Moreover, you will be called upon sometimes to visit sick persons, who are not members of the church; and who may be strangers to the grace of God, and the way of salvation by Christ; and who have been either profane persons, or resting upon their civility and morality, pleasing themselves, that they have wronged no man, and have done that which is right between man and man; and now in dying circumstances, hope, on this account, things will be well with them; and whose relatives may be afraid of your saying anything to interrupt this carnal peace; yet, be faithful, labor to show the one and the other their wretched and undone state by nature; the necessity of repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, in his blood,

righteousness, and atoning sacrifice, for peace, pardon, justification, and salvation. This is a case, I assure you, will require a good deal of care, judgment, and faithfulness. And now, I doubt not, but by this time you will be ready to say, *who is sufficient for these things?* (~~4TP6~~ 2 Corinthians 2:16.) Wherefore,

Thirdly, *Consider the qualifications necessary to the performance of the ministerial work; and what things are requisite and useful for the due discharge of it:* and here let it be observed, that there are some things which are serviceable and useful in it, which, properly speaking, are not the qualifications for it; as for instance, the grace of God is a prerequisite to this work; it is highly proper that those who are engaged in it, should be partakers of it in truth: yet grace is not the ministerial qualification; for this is what all the saints have in common, the graces of the spirit, faith, hope, and love; they all obtain like precious faith, for nature, kind, and object, though not to the same degree, one as another; they are all called in one hope of their calling, by the same grace, to the same glory; and they are all taught of God to love God, Christ, and one another; yet this does not qualify them for ministers of the word; if grace was a ministerial qualification, all the Lord's people would be what *Moses* wished they were, even all of them *prophets*. Human learning is very useful and serviceable to a minister of the gospel; to have such a share of it, as to be capable of reading the scriptures in the original tongues in which they were written; and by means of knowledge of languages, to be able to read the writings of many excellent good men, written therein, to their profit and advantage; as well as to know the use of words, and the propriety of speech: and such who are called to the work of the ministry, who have not had a liberal education, and yet have time and leisure, are not easily to be excused, if they do not make use of their time, and those means that may be had, to improve themselves in useful knowledge; and yet, after all, the highest attainments in human literature are not ministerial qualifications; for a man may be able to read the Bible in the languages in which it was written, and yet not understand the things contained in it; for it is a sealed book, which when put into the hands of a learned man to read and interpret, he cannot, *because it is sealed*. Good natural parts are of great service and use to a minister of the word; as to have a clear understanding, a solid judgment, a lively fancy, a fruitful invention, and a retentive memory; but these a man may have, and yet not be fit to be a minister of the gospel; yea, men may have all the above things, grace, learning, and natural parts, and not be

qualified for this work. The apostle *Paul* had all of them; he was a man of good natural parts, which his adversaries perceived and owned; *his letters*, say they, *are mighty and powerful*, (^{<47002>}2 Corinthians 10:12.) wrote in a masculine style, and full of strong reasonings, and nervous arguments; he had a large share of human literature, being brought up at the feet of *Gamaliel*, in all the learning of the Jews, and of other nations; and he also was called by the grace of God; yet he does not ascribe his being a minister of the gospel to either, or all of their, but to a *gift* which he had received; a peculiar gift, fitting and qualifying him for this important work; for, speaking of the gospel, he says,

whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me; (^{<48007>}Ephesians 3:7.)

with which agree the words of the apostle *Peter*,

as everyone has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another: (^{<49040>}1 Peter 4:10.)

in some this gift may be greater, in others lets; but in all where it is, it more or less qualifies for the service of the ministry: *having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given unto us, whether prophecy*, let us prophesy

according to the proportion or analogy of faith; (^{<50016>}Romans 12:6.)

that is, let us interpret the scriptures, or preach the word, agreeable to the tenor of it: Now this gift lies in a competent knowledge of the scriptures, and of the things contained in them, and of a faculty of interpreting them to the edification of others; for the work of evangelical pastors or teachers, is to

feed the churches with knowledge and understanding; (^{<51015>}Jeremiah 3:15.)

which, unless they have a considerable share of themselves, they will not be able to do with any profit and advantage to others: these are spiritual men, who having spiritual gifts, are capable of making judgment of all things necessary to be known unto salvation; of this knowledge and of this gift the apostle is speaking, when he says,

whereby when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ. (^{<52004>}Ephesians 3:4.)

But now, besides this share of knowledge and furniture of the mind, there must be a capacity of expressing it to others, to make up the ministerial qualification; a man must not only have wherewith to teach others, or matter to instruct them in, but he must be capable of doing it in an apt and suitable manner, that tends to edification; which the apostle means by *utterance*, which is a gift, and by mens being *able to teach others also*, and by being *apt to teach*; (~~4069~~ Ephesians 6:19, ~~8402~~ 2 Timothy 2:2, ~~5402~~ 1 Timothy 3:2.) for it signifies little what a man knows, or how great soever is the furniture of his mind, or the largeness of his ideas, and the compass of his knowledge, if he is not capable of clothing his ideas with apt and suitable words to convey them to the understanding of others. So then this gift consists of knowledge and elocution; and on whomsoever this gift is bestowed, whether on a gracious or a graceless person, on a *John* or a *Judas*; ^{f1} or whether on a learned or unlearned man, on a *Paul* or a *Peter*; on a man of good natural parts or one of a meaner capacity; that is it that qualifies for the ministry; where indeed grace, learning, and natural parts all meet together in a man with this gift, they make him a very considerable and distinguished man. Now, there are various things that are requisite, in order to the due and regular exercise of this gift to usefulness.

1. There must be a call to the exercise of it: besides the inward call or disposition of the mind to such service, and which must be submitted to others;

for the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets;
(~~4143~~ 1 Corinthians 14:32.)

there must be an outward call by the church: it being notified to it by some means or another, that such an one is thought to have a gift for the ministry, the church calls him to the exercise of it, tries his gift, and judges of it; and upon approbation, such are separated and sent forth into the ministry, as *Saul* and *Barnabas* were; for no modest man will take this honor to himself, or thrust himself into this work, unless he is called to it; though in this rambling age of ours, there are many run who were never sent, and take upon them this work, without having a gift qualifying them for it, or a call from God or men unto it.

2. Where there is a gift, diligence and industry must be used to improve it; for otherwise it may decline, become less, and in length of time useless; yea, may be entirely lost or taken away; for gifts are not like grace; grace, though it may decline as to exercise, can never be lost; but gifts may, as

appears from the parable of the *talents*, by which I understand ministerial gifts; the man that had one talent wrapped it up in a napkin, and hid it in the earth, that is, he neglected it, and made no use of it; wherefore orders are given to take it from him, and give it to others; for *unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance*; everyone that hath a gift, and is diligent and constant in the use of it, that shall increase; but from him *that hath not*, who, though he has a gift, is as if he had none, neglecting to cultivate it, and make use of it, *shall be taken away even that which he hath*. (~~4753~~ Matthew 25:29.) Gifts, like some metals, unless frequently used, become rusty and good for nothing; hence the exhortation of the apostle to *Timothy*, not to neglect, but *to stir up* the gift of God that was in him, (~~5044~~ 1 Timothy 4:14, ~~5006~~ 2 Timothy 1:6.) as you stir up coals of fire, that they may give more light and heat; so gifts by use become brighter and brighter, and more beneficial.

3. Faithfulness is necessary to the due exercise of this gift; those that have it, are, or should be, *good stewards of the manifold grace of God*; and now

it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful;

(~~4040~~ 1 Peter 4:10, ~~4042~~ 1 Corinthians 4:2.)

to dispense the mysteries of God, of which they are stewards, unto others; and *when God has counted a man faithful, putting him into the ministry*, (~~5012~~ 1 Timothy 1:12.) he ought to continue faithful to him that has put him into it, to the souls of men committed to his care, and to the gospel, and the truths of it he is entrusted with. For

he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully, what is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord of hosts. (~~4238~~ Jeremiah 23:28.)

4. Wisdom and prudence are also very requisite in the exercise of this gift, both in the choice of subjects, and in the manner of treating them; a man that is a *steward* must be *wise* as well as *faithful*, *to give* to every one of the household *their portion of meat in due season*; (~~4022~~ Luke 12:42.) and a man that labors in the word and doctrine should be skillful in the scriptures, that *he may rightly divide the word of truth*; (~~5015~~ 2 Timothy 2:15.) and he that has to do with persons in various cases, and different circumstances, had need to have the understanding and *tongue of the learned to speak a word in season to him that is weary*. (~~2304~~ Isaiah 1:4.)

5. Ministers of the word ought to be careful of their lives and conversations; or otherwise, let their gifts be what they may, they will

become useless and unprofitable; they therefore should *take heed to themselves*, (^{<4018>}Acts 20:28.) to conduct and behave becoming their work and office; and so to walk as to

an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity, (^{<50412>}1 Timothy 4:12.)

and to take care they give no offense to the church, nor to the world, *that the ministry be not blamed*; (^{<50118>}2 Corinthians 6:3.) for it is a most shameful thing, that they which teach others not to sin, but to guard against it, should be guilty of the same themselves; see ^{<51023>}Romans 2:23, 24, where the apostle enlarges on this subject.

Fourthly, *Consider the means that are to be made use of for the cultivation and improvement of the ministerial gift*; and for the better discharge of the work and office to which you have been called and ordained. The directions the apostle gives to *Timothy* on this head, are well worthy of your notice, and should be closely pursued;

give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. — Meditate on these things, give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all: (^{<50413>}1 Timothy 4:13, 15.)

in the first and chief place study the Bible, read that attentively, compare one passage with another, spiritual things with spiritual, parallel places together; and particularly those that are more dark and obscure with those that are more clear and plain; that thereby you may know more of the mind of the Spirit of God and Christ in the sacred pages; for the inspired writings are

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works; (^{<50116>}2 Timothy 3:16, 17.)

for these will furnish out sufficient matter, both for things doctrinal and practical, to be insisted on in the ministry of the word; and with whatsoever may be necessary for the discharge of the ministerial office. Read also the writings of good men, for these are not preferred and transmitted to posterity for nothing, but for use; but then read them with care and caution, as human writings, liable to mistakes, and having their imperfections; compare them with the word of God, and so far as they agree with that, and are consistent with themselves, regard them, and not

otherwise. Meditate much on divine things, on the scriptures, and the doctrines contained in them: it is the character of every good man, that he *meditates in the law*, (~~<100>~~ Psalm 1:2.) or doctrine of the Lord continually; and he finds his account in it; his *meditation* of God, of Christ, and of spiritual things, is *sweet*, (~~<100>~~ Psalm 104:34.) and delightful to him; and much more should it be the constant work and employment of a minister of the word. *Luther*, as I remember, it is said of him, that he used to say, "Meditation, temptation, and prayer, make a "divine." For prayer is also very necessary to be frequently repeated, since this goes along with the ministry of the word, and is so very useful in respect of it. The apostles desired to be eased of the worldly concerns of the church, that they might give up themselves to *prayer*, as well as to *the ministry of the word*; (~~<100>~~ Acts 6:4.) and to the former in order to the latter. Ministers of the gospel should pray often, not only in public, but in private; not only for others, but for themselves; that they might be more qualified for their work, as well as be more successful in it; that they might have more spiritual light, knowledge, and understanding, and be more capable of instructing and feeding the people under their care; that they might have the eyes of their understandings more enlightened, to behold the wonderful things that are in the law, or doctrine of the Lord; and be better able to point them out to others.

Fifthly, *Consider on the one hand the difficulties and discouragements that attend the ministerial work; and on the other hand, the encouragements to proceed on in it.*

1. The difficulties and discouragements that attend it; these, I would observe, not to distress you in, or deter you from your work; but that, when you meet with them, they may not seem as though some strange or uncommon thing had happened unto you. There are some, which come from within a man's self; from in-dwelling sin, from *a law in the members warring against the law of the mind*; you will find when you would do good, evil is present with you, as particularly to hinder you in the pursuit of your studies; you will find a kind of slothfulness and disinclination to the work; nay, sometimes when the *spirit is willing* the flesh will be weak, (~~<100>~~ Matthew 26:42.) and wilt make excuses to put off preparation for it to another time. Sometimes you will be in darkness, and under divine desertions, and be in very uncomfortable frames; yet still you must go on, and prepare, in the best manner that you can, for instructing and comforting others; this is hard and difficult work, but it must be done: and

difficulties and discouragements sometimes arise from Satan's temptations, who is very busy with all good men, especially with ministers of the gospel: he desired to have *Peter* in his hands; he buffeted the apostle *Paul*; he levels his arrows at those who are the most fruitful, flourishing, and useful; as the archers that shot at *Joseph*, that *fruitful bough by a well*, and grieved him, though *his bow abode in strength, the arms of his hands being made strong by the mighty God of Jacob*. You must expect Satan's temptations; he will tempt you to that which is unbecoming your character and office; he will tempt you perhaps to entertain groundless jealousies of one or other of the members of the church; he will tempt you to drop your ministry, or however, in this place, and to do it in a pet and humor: these, and such like temptations, should be guarded against. Other discouragements will arise from the world, and the men of it, from their revilings and reproaches, wrath, rage, and persecutions in one shape or other; but none of these things should move you from your work, or cause you to desert it. Remember you are chosen, and called to be a soldier of Jesus Christ; and, as a good one, should endure hardness, hard words, and hard usage, for his sake: yea, the difficulties and discouragements of gospel-ministers are increased by professors of religion themselves; not only by those of other communities, who may traduce and speak ill of such, who are not altogether of the same principles with themselves, but by the members of the churches over which they are pastors; some of which are very weak and imprudent, and oftentimes make a minister very uncomfortable and uneasy by their words and actions; though these things should be considered as their weakness and infirmities, and to be bore with;

for we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please ourselves; (~~6106~~ Romans 15:1.)

yet these must be reckoned among a minister's difficulties and discouragements; but,

2. You are to consider the encouragements to go on in your work, notwithstanding what may be met with in it which is difficult and discouraging; and which is a superabundant counterbalance to that. Remember the gracious promises Christ has made of his presence with his ministers, and of his protection of them, and of his assistance in their work, and of a reward, though not of debt, yet of grace, that shall be given them: he has promised he will be with his ministers in successive generations, unto the end of the world, to supply and support them; he holds them in his

right hand, and will not suffer any to set upon them, to hurt them, until they have done the work he has called them to, and is designed to be done by them; his power and grace are sufficient to bear them up in, and carry them through whatever service he engages them in; his strength is made perfect in their weakness, and as their day is, their strength is; so he has promised, and so he performs. Remember and consider, that they that be *wise*, and teach and instruct others, shall *shine as the brightness of the firmament in the kingdom-state*; and *they that turn many to righteousness*, or justify many, by teaching the doctrine of justification, or directing souls to the righteousness of Christ alone for it, *shall be as the stars forever and ever*; (~~27124~~ Daniel 12:4.) that those who have taken good heed to their flocks, over which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers, and have faithfully fed them, and carefully watched over them, *when the chief shepherd shall appear, shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*; (~~41816~~ 1 Peter 5:4.) and will hear from Christ,

well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. (~~41521~~ Matthew 25:21.)

But I proceed to observe,

II. The prayer or wish of the apostle for Timothy, that the Lord would give him understanding in all things. Upon this I shall be very short and only drop a few things by way of explanation; and by *all things*, in which he desires he might have an understanding, he does not mean all things natural and civil; indeed, the understanding of all such things comes from God; *every good and perfect gift in nature, or in providence, as well as in grace, comes from the Father of lights*; (~~30117~~ James 1:17.) all the wisdom and knowledge which *Bezaleel* and *Aboliab*, had for devising and working curious works for the tabernacle, were of God; he put it into their hearts, and filled them with wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in these things; yea, even all the understanding the plowman has in plowing the ground, and breaking the clods, and harrowing them, and in sowing his seed, is all from God; he instructs him *to discretion*; this comes from him *who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working*; and so the same may be said of knowledge of all natural and civil things, of all arts and sciences, liberal and mechanic: and indeed a minister of the word had need to be acquainted with all things in nature and civil life, thoroughly to understand all things contained in the scriptures of truth; since there are such a variety of metaphors, and so many allusions to things natural and

civil; and such an adorable fullness in them, as *Tertullian* expresses it. But the apostle, no doubt, means understanding in spiritual things, in the scriptures, in the doctrines and mysteries of grace. The understanding of man is naturally dark as to those things; it is the Lord that gives men an understanding to know them, that opens their hearts, and enlightens their minds by the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of them; for whatever understanding natural men may have of natural things, they have none of spiritual ones;

there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. (~~ROM~~ Romans 3:12.)

Now, besides the understanding of spiritual things, which God gives in common to his people, he gives to his ministers a larger understanding of divine things, and of the scriptures and the truths of them; he opens their understandings, as Christ did his disciples, that they may understand the scriptures; he gives unto them to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to a greater degree than he does to others; and he enlarges their understandings, and increases their gifts, their light, and knowledge; which is what the apostle in a more especial manner prays for here, on the account of *Timothy*; that he might be better instructed in everything relative to his office, as an evangelist and minister of the word, and know how to behave in the church of God, which is the house of God, the pillar and ground of truth; and which is the principal end of his writing this; and the former epistle to him. I have only one observation more to make, and that is, that the clause may be considered as an assertion, or a promise, *and the Lord will give thee understanding in all things*; and so is used as an encouragement to consider well what had been said, and to expect a richer furniture of knowledge, and a larger measure of spiritual light and understanding; and as Christ gives more light to his people, who are made light by him; and there is such a thing as growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ, and of all spiritual things, in common christians; and the path of the just is as the shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day; so faithful ministers of the word, who are diligent and industrious in their work, may expect, and be assured, that God will give them an enlarged knowledge and understanding of divine truths, and of everything necessary to the due performance of that sacred work they are called unto, and holy office they are invested with. I shall close, as I begun, with the words of my text, *Consider what I say*, or have been saying; consider the work of the ministry, that it is a work, and a laborious one, yet

honorable and deserving of esteem from men; and that God will never leave his servants in it: consider the several parts of it, as the ministration of the gospel, the administration of ordinances, the care of the discipline of Christ's house, and visiting the afflicted and distressed: consider the necessary qualifications for it, and the things that are useful to the performance of it: consider the means to be made use of to enable for the better and more regular exercise of spiritual gifts; and the difficulties and discouragements that, on the one hand, attend this work; and, on the other, the encouragements to go on in it; *and the Lord give thee understanding in all things*; in all divine and spiritual things, in the truths of the gospel, and in everything relative to your office, and the due discharge of it, you have this day been invested with. May the blessing of God rest upon you, and may you have success in your work.

FOOTNOTE

^{ft1} Judas had the same call and mission from Christ to preach the gospel with the rest of the apostles; and had the same gifts, ordinary and extraordinary qualifying for it; and behaved so well in his office, that the rest of the disciples rather distrusted themselves than him, on Christ's declaring, one of them should betray him, saying each, *Is it I?* ~~<001>~~Matthew 10:1-8, and ~~<051>~~26:21, 22. And, though I am of opinion, that for the most part, God gives special grace to those on whom he bestows gifts for the ministry, yet not always; as the instances in ~~<072>~~Matthew 7:22, 23, ~~<015>~~Philippians 1:15, 16, show, and is a case the apostle supposes, ~~<027>~~1 Corinthians 9:27, and ~~<031>~~13:1, 2, and such may be the means of the conversion and edification of men: the reason of which is, it is the word of God they preach, and God can and does make use of his own word, to such purposes, by what instruments he pleases.