

Of the Public Ministry of the Word.

by John Gill

John Gill's sermon emphasizes the importance and continuity of the Public Ministry of the Word as a divine ordinance essential for the church's growth and maturity until Christ's return.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:11

Topics: "Public Ministry", "Gospel Preaching"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of the public ministry of the Word as a divine ordinance established by Christ, intended to continue until His return. He outlines the historical context of this ministry, tracing its roots from the Old Testament through the New Testament, highlighting its role in gathering the elect and perfecting the saints. Gill stresses that the ministry is a laborious work requiring moral integrity, divine calling, and a deep understanding of Scripture, aimed at the edification of the church and the glory of God. He also notes that the public preaching of the gospel is essential for the conversion of sinners and the growth of the church. Ultimately, the ministry serves to fulfill Christ's command to spread the gospel to all nations.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 3--Chapter 3

OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Next to the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, is the Public Ministration of the Word; which is an ordinance of Christ under the gospel dispensation, to be continued in the church unto the end of the world: Christ, as the ascended Lord and King, having received gifts for men, gives them to men, qualifying them for the work of the ministry; which work is to be exercised by them until all the elect of God are gathered in, the members of Christ's body, the church, completed, and the number of the saints perfected, and all brought to a state of maturity in grace, and to everlasting glory and happiness; all which and more may be observed in Ephesians 4:11-13. 1.

The public ministry of the word is an ordinance of Christ in the New Testament, and to be continued till his second coming; it is not, indeed, confined to the New Testament, nor peculiar to it, though most eminent in it. 1a. First, there was something similar to it from the beginning, during the Old Testament dispensation.

1a1. In the patriarchal state; the gospel was first preached by the Son of God to Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden; the great salvation first began to be spoken by him, who revealed himself as the "Seed of the woman," that should bruise the "head" of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), which was the grand text the patriarchs preached from; the truths and doctrines contained in which, as handed down to them, they opened and explained to their posterity, according to the revelation of the mind and will of God made to them.

In the times of Enos, the grandson of Adam, social worship was set up, and men began to perform the public exercises of religion (Gen. 4:26). Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied or preached of the second coming of Christ to judge the world; and no doubt, as he prophesied or preached of that, so of the first coming of Christ, to save men. Noah was the "eighth preacher of righteousness;" for so the words in 2 Peter 2:5 may be rendered[1]; though they will admit of another sense, "Even a preacher of the righteousness of faith," of which he was an heir (Heb. 11:7), and Christ, by his Spirit in him, preached to a disobedient multitude with much longsuffering and patience (1 Peter 3:19, 20).

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, was one; who the other six preachers were is not said. The first Adam, no doubt, was one, whom God, as a learned divine[2] says, "made for this end, that he might be a witness, a "preacher," and a praiser of his virtues and works, and, as the common master of mankind, might admonish and instruct his children and grandchildren what they might hope for, or fear, in this life and after it." And righteous Abel was another, who not only preached while alive, "but being dead, yet speaketh": and perhaps it may not be very difficult to find out the other four.

The distinction of the sons of God, professors of religion, and the sons of men, profane persons, obtained in the times of Noah, and before (Gen. 6:2). Maimonides[3] observes, that their wise men say of the prophets that went before them of the house of the judgment of Eber, and the school of Methuselah, that they were all prophets, and taught men as preachers, doctors, and preceptors do. As Abraham had the gospel preached to him, so he preached it to others, as he had opportunity; the "three hundred and eighteen servants born" in his house, were "trained" up, or "instructed"[4] by him in religious things, as the word used signifies (Gen. 14:14), and a testimony of this is bore of him by the Lord himself (Gen. 18:19).

In the times of Job, who seems to have lived before the giving of the law, the sons of God, professors of religion, met together on a certain stated day, to present themselves, soul and body, to the Lord, in the performance of religious duties, which was but their reasonable service; and though then they had no written word to read or explain, yet they had a revelation of the mind and will of God to them, by one means or another; as in visions, by dreams, &c. which they kept not from, but made known to one another (Job 6:10; see Job 4:12-19). 1a2.

Under the Mosaic dispensation there was a tabernacle pitched, called, the "tabernacle of the congregation;" and by Onkelos, "the tabernacle of the house of doctrine;" where the people resorted and sought doctrine. Priests and Levites were appointed, among other things, to instruct the people of Israel; they were interpreters and expounders of the law of Moses to them; the tribe of Levi in general (Deut. 33:10), and the priests, the sons of Aaron particularly (Lev. 10:11), hence we read of "a teaching priest," and that "the priest's lips should keep knowledge," and publish it (2 Chron. 15:3; Mal. 2:7).

And the Levites also, who were dispersed among the tribes, were employed in this way; in the times of Jehoshaphat they taught the people the law of the Lord throughout all the cities of Judah; and in the times of Josiah they are described as those who "taught all Israel what was holy to the Lord," (2 Chron. 17:9,

35:3) and in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah they "read in the book of the law distinctly," in the hearing of all the people; "and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8). 1a3.

Under the first and second temples were prophets, who also were interpreters and expounders of the law and instructors of the people; some of which were trained up for that purpose; hence we read of companies, colleges or schools of the prophets, and of the sons or disciples of the prophets, at Naioth, Bethel, and Jericho: some were more immediately raised up and inspired by God. And these prophets had certain places and stated times, weekly and monthly, where and when the people resorted to them for counsel, direction, and instruction; as appears from 2 King 4:23 the note of Gersom on the place is; "It seems, that in those days, they used to come before great men, to hear their words; and they taught them in the way in which they should walk, and the work they should do" (see 2 King 4:38, 6:32).

The prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others, were delivered as the word of the Lord, and published separately and singly, as sermons and discourses to the people; and particularly it is observed of Ezekiel, that the people came in a body and sat before him, and heard him, and seemingly with great attention, and with much pleasure and delight; but it is complained of them, that they only heard his words, but did them not (Ezek. 33:31, 32). 1a4. Some time after the Babylonish captivity, synagogues were erected, and synagogue worship set up; one part of which lay in public reading and preaching the law in them every Sabbath day; and this was a practice which had obtained "of old time," long before the times of Christ and his apostles; as appears from Acts 15:21.

In these synagogues our Lord himself taught, and it was a custom with him so to do, and which he was allowed; and we read of his going into the synagogue at Nazareth on a sabbath day, where he stood up to read, and had the book of the prophet Isaiah delivered to him, which he opened, and out of it read his text, and then explained and applied it (Luke 4:15-21). And so the apostles of Christ preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and which they were not only allowed, but were called upon by the rulers of the synagogue at a certain place, to give a word of exhortation to the people, if they had any; by which it appears, that it was not only usual to read the law, but to preach or deliver out a discourse to the people; and accordingly, we have an account of a sermon the apostle Paul preached in the synagogue, at their invitation (Acts 13:5, 15, 16; &c) and this custom of the synagogue is confirmed by Philo the Jew[5] who says, that when "they came to the holy places, called synagogues, according to their age in order, the young men sit under the elders (at their feet), and with a decent composure attend to hearing; when one taking the book, reads; and another one of the most skilful, explains what is not known," or is more obscure. 1b.

Secondly, the public ministry of the word more clearly and generally obtained under the New Testament, or gospel dispensation, according to the prophecy of it (Isa. 2:3). The first public preacher of this kind, and under this dispensation, was John the Baptist; "The law and the prophets were until John," (Luke 16:16) he came first preaching in the wilderness of Judea, in a very loud and clamorous way; he was "the voice of one crying, bowntov, of one bellowing like an ox," as the word signifies.

The doctrine he preached was the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; which, though rejected by the Scribes and Pharisees, was received by publicans and harlots; and this was called, "his course," the course of his ministry, which he fulfilled in a very public manner, to all the people of Israel (Acts 13:24, 25). Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose forerunner John was, was "the minister of the circumcision," the minister of the word to the circumcised Jews; he was sent of God to preach the gospel to them, and was anointed with the gifts and graces of the Spirit of God, without measure, for that purpose; at whose

doctrine his audience was astonished; he spoke such words of grace and wisdom as never man spoke, to the amazement of those that heard him; and this he did in the most public manner, in the synagogues and in the temple.

The apostles of Christ were called and sent forth by him to be public ministers of the word; they were called by him from their nets to be fishers of men; they were sent forth by him at first to preach the gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; but after his resurrection he enlarged their commission, and sent them into all the world, to teach all nations, and preach the gospel to every creature; and since there has been a succession of ordinary ministers of the word, more or less, in all ages, whom Christ, by bestowing gifts upon them, has made pastors and teachers, able ministers of the New Testament, and faithful dispensers of the mysteries of grace.

For, 1c. Thirdly, the public ministry of the word is an ordinance of Christ; there are private teachings, which are not only commendable, but are obligatory on men; as on the heads of families, parents, and masters; parents are to teach their children, and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and masters are to instruct their servants, and command their household to keep the way of the Lord; and even women, particularly aged women, are to be "teachers of good things;" and every man who has received a gift, though only for private use, should minister it one to another in private conference and conversation; but it is the public ministry of the word which is the special ordinance of Christ for public good and for general usefulness.

This is not a device of men for sinister ends, and with selfish and lucrative views; but is by the appointment of Christ, who ordered his disciples, that what they heard in the ear they should "preach upon the house tops;" that is, in the most public manner; and therefore sent them into all the world, to preach the gospel to every creature under heaven; and accordingly the apostle Paul, that eminent minister of the word, preached it publicly, as well as from house to house, and even from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum.

It is Christ that appears to men, and calls them, and makes them able and faithful ministers of the New Testament; hence such are called "ministers of God," of his making, and not man's; and "good ministers of Jesus Christ;" educated, not at schools and academies, but "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine". The gifts qualifying them for such service are from Christ; the apostle Paul himself was made a minister of the gospel, "according to the gift of the grace of God given unto him;" and it is he who gives gifts to ordinary ministers of the word, and makes them pastors and teachers in his churches; the apostles had their mission and commission from him (John 20:21), and so all ministers of the word in successive ages; for "how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:15) and they have their doctrines from him, which they are to preach; the words of the wise are from "one Shepherd," who is Christ; and it is with words and doctrines from him they, as under shepherds, are to feed the flock, even the doctrines of the gospel; which are not of man, nor taught by man, but are by the revelation of Christ; particularly such as pardon by his blood, justification by his righteousness, and atonement by his sacrifice; which he has ordered to be published in his name, to all nations, and which accordingly has been (Luke 24:47; Acts 13:38, 39). 1d.

Fourthly, the public ministry of the word is a standing ordinance, to be continued to the second coming of Christ; there will be ministers, and so a ministry unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:20, 24:3, 14), and this will not be until all the elect of God are gathered in; the world, and the continuance of it, is for their sakes: the reason why the coming of Christ to destroy the world is seemingly deferred, is, because God is not willing that any of his beloved ones should perish, but that all should come to repentance; and when

they are all brought in, he will then come and burn the world: hence the work of the ministry, Christ has given gifts to men to qualify them for, will be continued, 1d1.

Until all the elect of God "come to the unity of the faith," until all and everyone of them believe in Christ; for as many as are ordained unto eternal life, do and shall believe in him; and as faith comes by hearing the word, the ministration of it will be continued until they all believe. 1d2. Until they all and everyone come to "the knowledge of the Son of God," whom to know is life eternal; and this knowledge is by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, and which Christ himself gives, and that by means of the word, called, the word of knowledge; which must be continued till all know him from the least to the greatest; and their knowledge, which is now in part, is perfect. 1d3.

Until they come "to a perfect man;" that is, until the church of Christ, which like a man consists of various members, is complete, and all the members joined into one body, and set in their proper place, and become as one man; and till every individual is perfect; not only as to parts, but as to degrees, and that in faith, in knowledge, in holiness, and in every grace. And, 1d4. Until they come "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;" that is, the mystical body of Christ, his church, which is his fulness, and will appear so; when all the elect are gathered in, and are filled with the graces of the Spirit, and these at their full growth, and they have arrived to their just proportion in the body, and to the measure of their stature in it they are appointed to; and till all this is accomplished, the gospel ministry will continue (see Eph. 4:12, 13).

I proceed to show, 2. That the ministry of the word is a work; it is called "the work of the ministry," (Eph. 4:13) it is a ministering work, a service, and not a dominion; such who are employed in it have not the dominion, neither over the faith nor over the practice of men, no further than enjoined by the word of God: the ministry is a service, as the word imports, and not a "sinecure;" there is business to be done, and a great deal of it; enough to employ all the time and talents of ministers, and no room nor leisure to indulge to sleepiness, to laziness, and slothfulness: and it is a laborious work; the ministers of the gospel are not to be loiterers, but labourers in Christ's vineyard; they labour in the word and doctrine, which requires much reading of the scriptures, frequent prayer, and constant meditation and "study," in preparing for their work, which is a great "weariness to the flesh;" and much "zeal," fervour, and affection in the performance of it, which is attended with much fatigue, and an expense of the physical spirits; to which the apostle may have some respect (2 Cor. 12:15), and the ministers of the gospel are not only fellow labourers with one another, but with the Lord himself in his church; the manuring, cultivation, planting, and watering his vineyard, and the building up of his people in a church state, are laborious services; so that if the Lord did not go forth working with them, it would be to no purpose; "Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth," which are both parts of the gospel ministry, but "God that giveth the increase," success to their ministrations; "And except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it," (1 Cor. 3:7, 9; Ps. 127:1) but the presence of the Lord with them, and the operation of his hands seen in their ministry, are an encouragement to them: and besides, their work is a good work (1 Tim. 3:1).

A work pleasantly, profitably, and honourably good; pleasant to a minister, whose heart is in it; profitable, to them that sit under it, when attended with a divine blessing; and honourable in itself; what more so than to be the servants of the most high God, and to be employed in such service, as to show unto men the way of salvation? than to be the ambassadors of Christ, and to stand in his stead? 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?

And it is a work worthy of honour from men; such who labour in it, are "worthy of double honour;" of an honourable maintenance, and of an honourable respect; they are to be received with gladness, to be had in reputation, to be known, owned, and acknowledged by those over whom they are, as their fathers, guides, and governors; and to be highly esteemed for their work's sake: and it is the "work of the Lord and of Christ," (1 Cor. 16:10; Phil. 2:30) to which they are called by Christ, qualified for it by him, and assisted in it; of which he is the sum and substance, and when rightly done, makes for his glory: and in this they should be constant, steadfast, and immoveable, always abounding in it, since their labour is not in vain in the Lord; though no man is sufficient for it of himself; his ability is of God, and his dependence must be upon him both for assistance and success.

I go on to inquire, 3. Who are fit and proper persons to be employed in this work. 3a. They must be of a good moral character; an immoral man is not fit to be a member of a church, much less a minister of the word: among the qualifications of a bishop, overseer, or pastor of a church, several moral characters are observed; as, that such must be blameless, of good behaviour, and have a good report of them that are without; inoffensive in life and conversation, lest the ministry should be blamed, and lie under reproach: but then he must be more than a moral man, both in theory and practice; a mere moralist is not capable of doing the work of an evangelist, or of a gospel preacher. 3b.

They must be such who are partakers of the grace of God in truth, or otherwise they will not be able to speak of divine things feelingly and experimentally; of which they cannot say they have heard and seen, and felt them, and therefore cannot speak of them; in some cases they must be dumb, and not able to speak to them; nor can they have a fellow feeling with souls tempted and deserted; nor have compassion on the ignorant; nor speak a word in season to weary souls: but then, they must have more grace, have more than in common other Christians have; or else, as Moses wished, all the Lord's people would be fit to be prophets and ministers of the word. 3c.

They must be endowed by Christ with ministerial gifts, such as Christ received for men, and gives unto them, whereby they are made and fitted by him to be pastors and teachers; it is not grace, nor human learning, nor natural parts, which qualify for the ministry of themselves, though they are all meet and useful; but a gift from Christ; the apostle Paul had all the above things, but he ascribes his being a minister of the gospel to neither of them, but to a "gift" he had received, fitting and qualifying him for this important work (Eph. 3:7, 8), and this gift is in some greater, in others less; but in all where it is, it more or less qualifies for the work of the ministry (Rom. 12:6). 3d.

They must be studious in the scriptures, and have a competent knowledge of things contained in them; whereby "the man of God," the minister of Christ, "may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," and particularly unto the work of the ministry (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). They should make the Bible their chief study, and attend to the diligent and constant reading of it, and meditate upon the things in it; and give themselves up wholly to them, that their profiting in the knowledge of the mystery of Christ might be manifest; for as they are to feed the churches "with knowledge and understanding," it is necessary they themselves should have a good share of such knowledge; and such who are like Apollos, mighty in the scriptures, are as scribes, well "instructed unto the kingdom of God" (Matthew 13:52). 3e.

They must have a call both from God and men to this work; "No man takes this honour to himself, but he that is called of God;" which is the inward call, and is known by the kind of gifts bestowed upon a man, fitting for such service; and by the providence of God, inclining and directing the church to separate him to the work to which he has called him; and the outward call is by the church itself, upon trial of his gifts. And,

3f. They must be sent forth, they must have a mission from Christ, and that by the church (Rom. 10:15), the apostles of Christ were sent forth by him, as he was by his Father (John 20:21), there were some in Jeremiah's time who ran, and were not sent; prophesied, though not spoken to; but these were not true prophets and ministers of God. 3g.

They must be such who are counted faithful, and "put into the ministry" by the Lord himself; as the apostle Paul was (1 Tim. 1:12), not who thrust themselves, who intrude into this office, and take it to themselves, without the leave of God or men. 3h. They are only the proper persons to exercise this ministry, to whom it is given, and who have received it of the Lord, and have given themselves up to it: the apostle speaks of the ministry of the word as what he had "received of the Lord Jesus;" as a gift bestowed on him, a trust committed to him, and therefore was concerned to fulfil it; and directs to it as an argument to be used with Archippus, "to fulfil it," (Acts 20:24; Col. 4:17) and therefore such should give themselves up wholly to it, and employ their time and talents in it; addict themselves to the ministration of the saints, as the house of Stephanas did; and as little as possible entangle themselves with the affairs of life, but give themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer, as the apostles chose (Acts 6:4). 3i.

They should be both "able" and "apt" to teach, have abilities from Christ for this work, who only makes men "able ministers of the New Testament;" and also have utterance of speech, a gift of elocution, so as to be able to clothe their ideas with proper words, conveying in an easy manner the sense of them to the understanding of others; and should seek to find out acceptable and suitable words, as the royal preacher is said to do (Eccl. 12:10), giving pleasure and profit to those that hear them (2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Tim. 3:2). 3j.

They must be such who "study to show themselves workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth;" giving the true sense of it, searching into the deep things in it, and imparting to everyone their portion, agreeable to their age, of children, young men, and fathers; to children, the sincere milk of the word; to those more grown, strong meat: also should distinguish between saints and sinners, the precious and the vile, giving the children their bread, and not holy things to dogs. 4.

The subject matter of the work of the ministry, is next to be inquired into. This, in the whole compass of it, takes in the ministration of the word, the administration of ordinances, the exercise of church discipline, and the whole care of the flock; but that branch of it under consideration is, the ministration of the gospel; and what that is may be learnt, 4a. From the names by which it is called. 4a1. The "ministry of the word," in general, the apostles proposed to give themselves up to (Acts 6:4), which is not the word of men, but of God; and which is spoken by the ministers of it as such, and received by the hearers of it, in whom it works effectually (Heb. 13:7; 1 Thess. 2:13), and is called the word of faith, the word of truth, the word of reconciliation, and the word of life and of salvation (Rom. 10:8; Eph. 1:13; 2 Cor. 5:19; Phil. 2:16; Acts 13:26). 4a2.

The ministration of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:8), so called, because it is to be spoken in words which the Holy Ghost teacheth; and it makes known the things of the Spirit of God, spiritual truths and doctrines, which the natural man receiveth not; and by means of it the Spirit of God, and his grace are communicated and received; hence a minister of the gospel is described as one that ministers the Spirit to men; that is, is the instrument of their receiving the grace and gifts of the Spirit (Gal. 3:2, 5). 4a3.

The ministration of righteousness (2 Cor. 3:9), which is the "word of righteousness;" so called, because therein is "revealed the righteousness of God from faith to faith," (Heb. 5:13; Rom. 1:17) the grand and principal doctrine of it, is justification by the righteousness of Christ (Acts 13:39). 4a4. The ministry of

reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18), called, the "word of reconciliation," (2 Cor. 5:19) which is no other than the gospel of peace; the word preaching peace by Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all (Eph. 6:15; Acts 10:36), which does not propose to men to make their peace with God; but declares that peace is made by the blood of Christ, and that reconciliation, atonement, and satisfaction for sin, are made by the sufferings, death, and sacrifice of Christ. 4b.

Secondly, what this ministry is may be learnt from what the ministers of Christ are directed to preach, and which they make the subject of their ministrations. As, 4b1. The gospel: of the gospel they are ministers; their commission is to preach the gospel; it is the gospel of the blessed God, which is committed to their trust; and there is a woe upon them if they preach not the gospel. Which is called, 4b1a. The gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24), it being a declaration of the grace and favour of God in Christ; that salvation is entirely of grace, and not of works, from first to last; that the first step to it, election, is the "election of grace;" that justification is, "freely by the grace of God;" that forgiveness of sins, is "according to the riches of grace;" that adoption is owing to the amazing love of God; and that eternal life is the "gift," the free grace gift of God through Christ: all which are the subjects of the gospel ministry. 4b1b.

It is often called the gospel of Christ, the word of Christ, and the doctrine of Christ; which treats of his person, as the Son of God; of his offices, as Mediator, Prophet, Priest, and King; and of the grace that is in him; and of the blessings of grace that come by him: and whoever brings not this doctrine, is not to be received and encouraged (2 John 5:9, 10). 4b1c. The gospel of salvation, the word of salvation, and salvation itself; it is a publication of salvation by Christ; it is the faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ came into the world to save the chief of sinners; it declares, that there is salvation in him, and in no other; and that whoever believes in him shall be saved: this is the gospel every faithful minister preaches, and every sensible sinner desires to hear. 4b2.

Christ and him crucified is the subject matter, the sum and substance of the gospel ministry; "We preach Christ crucified;" this is the preaching or the doctrine of the cross; the doctrine of salvation by a crucified Christ; of peace by the blood of his cross; of the reconciliation of God's elect in one body, by the cross; of the atonement and expiation of their sins by his sufferings and death upon it; this the apostle Paul determined to make the subject, and the alone subject, of his ministrations (1 Cor. 1:23, 2:2). 4c.

Thirdly, the ministry of the word takes in everything respecting doctrine; and in general it is required, that it be sound; the words of faith and sound doctrine, the form of sound words, sound speech, which cannot be condemned; and things which become sound doctrine, which are healthful and salutary, the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus; and which are opposed to unsound, unhealthful doctrines, false doctrines, which eat as do a canker: and sound doctrine is such as is according to the scriptures, which are "profitable for doctrine;" from whence every doctrine is to be fetched, and thereby proved and confirmed, according to which every minister of the word is to preach (Isa. 8:20), and it is by this rule every hearer is to judge of the soundness or unsoundness of it, as the Bereans did (Acts 17:11), the doctrine delivered in the ministry of the word should be the same that was preached by Christ and his apostles; the first Christians continued steadfastly "in the apostles' doctrine;" and, indeed, if any other doctrine is preached, it is not to be received (Gal. 1:8, 9), and this is the doctrine which is "according to godliness;" which teaches it, encourages, promotes, and enforces it; such as the doctrines of election, of free justification by Christ's righteousness, of full pardon of sin by his blood, and of the final perseverance of the saints; which are no licentious doctrines, though slanderously so charged; but constrain men to live to Christ, who died for them and rose again; and to which every minister of the gospel should take heed; this is the apostle's advice to Timothy, "Take heed to thyself, and to thy doctrine," (1 Tim. 4:16) that it be pure and incorrupt, agreeable to the

scriptures, the same with the doctrine of Christ and his apostles, and which promotes holiness of life and conversation. 4d.

Fourthly, the ministry of the word takes in the several duties of religion, which are to be insisted on in their course; and saints are to be exhorted to the exercise of them upon evangelical principles and motives; they are to be taught to observe whatsoever Christ has commanded, every ordinance of his, and every duty both with respect to God and men; they are to be put in mind to be ready to every good work, and to be careful to maintain them for necessary uses; every duty, public and private, personal, relative, and domestic, as well as every doctrine, are to be inculcated throughout the course of the gospel ministry. 5.

The manner in which the work of the ministry is to be performed may be next observed. And, 5a. It should be done diligently and constantly, with great sedulity and perseverance, "in season and out season," (2 Tim. 4:2) and the apostle having mentioned several important doctrines of the gospel, thus charges Titus: "These things I will, that thou affirm constantly," publicly and privately, and from house to house, as he did (Titus 3:8; Acts 20:20). 5b. With great plainness and perspicuity (2 Cor. 3:12, 4:2), delivering out truth in a clear and open manner, without disguise; not using ambiguous expressions, phrases of a doubtful or double meaning, and an unintelligible jargon of words; but language plain and easy to be understood by those of the meanest capacity; yet not base and sordid, but above contempt; should speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but in the words of the Holy Ghost, in scripture language, or what is agreeable to it. 5c.

Fully and completely; which is done when every truth is preached, and none concealed, and no duty omitted; when nothing that is profitable is kept back, and the whole counsel of God is declared; and when it is preached "fully," as it was by the apostle Paul; and "full proof of the ministry" is made, which he directs to; and the ministry received of the Lord Jesus is fulfilled in each of the parts and branches of it (Rom. 15:19; 2 Tim. 4:5; Col. 4:17). 5d. Faithfully (Jer. 23:28), ministers are stewards of the mysteries of God, and of his grace; and "it is required of stewards, that a man be found faithful," as well as wise (1 Cor. 4:1, 2; Luke 12:42) more honourable character cannot well be had, than what is given of Tychicus, that he was a "beloved brother, and faithful minister in the Lord;" and noticing can be more desirable, or confer a greater degree of honour, than at last to hear from Christ, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Eph. 6:21; Matthew 25:21, 23). 5e.

Sincerely; delivering out "the sincere milk of the word;" not corrupting it; not using any artful methods to colour things, and put a false gloss upon them; but exposing truth to public view in its native simplicity, without any sinister ends and selfish views; without any strife and contention, but of good will, to the glory of Christ, and the welfare of immortal souls (2 Cor. 2:17, 4:2; Phil. 1:15, 16). 5f. Fervently; it is said of Apollos, that "being fervent in the Spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord," (Acts 18:25) and the apostle Paul served God "with his Spirit in the gospel of his Son;" that is, his whole heart and soul were engaged in the ministration of it (Rom. 1:9). 5g.

The gospel, and the truths of it, should be ministered with certainty, and not with doubtfulness; there is such a thing as "the full assurance of understanding" in private Christians (Col. 2:2), and much more should be in ministers of the word; who should not be afraid of being reckoned dogmatical; they should be so; that is, they ought to be at a point about, and be assured of the truths they deliver to others; "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ the Son of the living God," said the apostles of Christ; and so with respect to every other truth; "We believe, and therefore speak," with certainty and confidence (2 Tim. 3:4; John 6:69; 2 Cor. 4:13). 5h.

And so they may, as they should, "speak boldly, as they ought to speak," without the fear of men, which brings a snare; and not seeking to please them; for then they would not be the servants of Christ: thus the apostles, not intimidated with the threats and menaces of men, the persecutions of wicked men, and the opposition of false teachers; "were bold in their God to speak the gospel of God with much contention" (Eph. 6:19, 20; 1 Thess. 2:2, 4). 5i. The gospel should be preached consistently; it should be uniform, and all of a piece; no contradiction, no yea and nay in it; the "trumpet" should not give "an uncertain sound;" otherwise it will occasion great confusion in the minds of those that hear it, and throw them into the utmost perplexity, not knowing what to believe. 5j.

The word should be dispensed wisely; the ministers of it should be wise, as well as faithful, to give to everyone their portion, and that in due season; they should study to be skilful work men, rightly dividing the word of truth; it requires that they should have the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season to him that is weary; "he that winneth souls is wise;" and being "crafty," the apostle says, he "caught the Corinthians with guile," not with a sinful, but a laudable and commendable one. 6.

The utility of the public ministry of the word may be next considered. And, 6a. In general; its use is for the enlargement of the interest of Christ in the world; and it is by means of the gospel being preached to all nations in all the world, that the kingdom of Christ has been spread every where; not only in Judea, where the gospel was first preached, but throughout the Gentile world multitudes were converted, and churches were set up everywhere; Christianity triumphed, and heathenism every where abolished.

Julian the apostate observing this, in imitation of the Christians, and thinking thereby to increase and establish heathenism, appointed lectures and expositions of heathenish dogmas, respecting both morality and things more abstruse, and public prayers, and singing at stated hours, in pagan temples[6]. 6b. The ministry of the word is for the conversion of sinners; without which churches would not be increased nor supported, and must in course fail, and come to nothing; but the hand of the Lord being with his ministers, many in every age believe and turn to the Lord, and are added to the churches; by which means they are kept up and preserved: and hence it is necessary in the ministers of the word, to set forth the lost and miserable estate and condition of men by nature, the danger they are in, the necessity of regeneration and repentance, and of a better righteousness than their own, and of faith in Christ; which things are blessed for the turning of men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. 6c.

Another use of it is, "For the perfecting of the saints;" for the completing of the number of the elect, in the effectual calling, even of those who are sanctified, or set apart by God the Father, by that eternal act of his, choosing them in Christ; or "for the jointing in of the saints," as it may be rendered; who were disjointed and scattered abroad by the fall of Adam; these are gathered in by the ministry of the word; so that none shall perish, but all come to repentance; and be inserted into the body of the church, and presented perfect in Christ Jesus: hence, after this, and previous to what follows, the phrase, for the work of the ministry, is placed; pointing out this twofold use of it; as for the perfecting the saints, so, 6d.

"For the edifying of the body of Christ," (Eph. 4:12) that is, his church; for it is by means of the word it maketh increase unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16) and thus the churches in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee, having rest, and peace, and blessed, with the ministration of the gospel, were "edified," and built up in their most holy faith, as individuals are (Acts 9:31; 1 Cor. 14:3). 6e. The principal end and use of it, to which all the others tend, is the glory of God, and which ought to be chiefly in view in the performance of it (1 Peter 4:11). ENDNOTES:

[1] Vid. Poli Synopsin in loc et alios criticos, Zegerum, Drusium, &c.

[2] Witsii Aegyptiac. l. 2. c. 15. s. 5. p. 179.

[3] Moreh Nevochim, par. 2. c. 39.

[4] wykynx "Catechumenos suos," Drusius.

[5] Quod Omnis Probus, p. 877.

[6] Nazianzen orat. 3. adv. Julian. p. 101, 102. Sozomen, Eccl. Hist. l. 5. c. 16.

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