

FIRST WORDS
TO
YOUNG CHRISTIANS

by

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CHAPTER FIVE
DUTIES TO THE PASTOR

THE RELATION BETWEEN A Christian pastor and his people is represented in the Scriptures as very solemn and tender. He is GOD's messenger, to speak to them the words of truth, to feed their souls with the bread of life, to watch for their souls as one who is soon to give an account to Him who sent him. He is to speak to them the truth in love, and not to suffer sin to pass unrebuked; regarding neither the frowns nor the smiles, the cheering nor the derision of those around him. He is to seek, above all things, their edification and spiritual profit, to study to build them up in faith and knowledge, and to have no greater joy than to see his spiritual children walking in the truth.

On the other hand, his people are to esteem him very highly in love for his work's sake. They are to give him a place in their hearts and in their prayers. They are to defend his reputation, to submit to his authority (as long as it is Scriptural) to provide for his temporal wants as long as he gives himself wholly to the Lord's work, and greatly to honor the message which he brings them from GOD.

The relation of the pastor and a flock is such that it should last for life, unless dissolved by some very marked and plain providence, in which the will of the great Head of the church will be clearly seen. The modern notion of hiring a pastor for a year, just as a farmer hires a man for his harvest work, so much work for so much pay, and then dismissing him when a few light-minded people profess to be dissatisfied and want a change, is a complete caricature of

THE APOSTOLIC RELATION OF PASTOR AND PEOPLE

Give your pastor your love and confidence. It is natural that you should be deeply attached to that minister under whose preaching you were brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is in JESUS. That you should like his preaching best, and that you should feel a warm glow of emotion at the very mention of his name in after life, is all very natural and proper. No minister of good sense will feel offended, but rather pleased, to hear Christians thus speak of their former pastors.

But when converts set up a particular minister as an idol in their souls; when they speak as if

they could get good under no instruction but his; when no prayers can lead their devotions heavenward but his; and when they refuse to give their affection and confidence to any other servant of the Lord JESUS, they show that their religion is of a very superficial character, and justify serious doubts whether they are not man's converts, rather than the converts of CHRIST.

No matter what pastor GOD in His providence places you under, if he only be a good man give him your hearty confidence and co-operation. He may not be so talented and eloquent as some others, for GOD in His sovereign goodness has given a variety of gifts to His ministers, but he is GOD's messenger to you, and it is at the peril of your soul that you despise his message.

By careful study of the Word of GOD, he has prepared his sermons with great mental toil, and poured his soul out in prayer over them, and there is good for your soul in them, if you will only place your mind in a proper attitude. Not the spirit of carping criticism and fault-finding is blessed, but that of earnest thirsting after truth, saying: "**Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!**"

Professing Christians will sometimes go home from the house of GOD, and in the presence of their children and of the impenitent utter the most unmerciful criticisms upon their pastor and his public efforts, and then wonder that their children are not converted in the great day of GOD, it may be found that they have been

THE MURDERER OF THEIR CHILDREN'S SOULS

by filling their minds with prejudice against the truth and its messenger.

Go to the pastor in all your spiritual difficulties, and make him the confidant of your soul-experiences. He will be able to cheer and encourage you, and to make the truth, in its beautiful adaptations, to bear upon your case.

And when you receive good under his ministry, do not be afraid to mention it to him. It will not make him proud, but will cheer and encourage him. When anyone seems impressed beneath his preaching, bring the case under his observation that it may be made a matter of special prayer and inquiry.

You will thus become a co-worker with your pastor; and he needs such aids. There is no work on earth so solemn and responsible, and none that so completely taxes all a man's best powers. None but those who have been called to the work, can tell the care and anxiety that fill the faithful pastor's heart, often chasing sleep from his pillow for whole nights. Resolve that if you cannot lighten these cares, at least you will not intentionally add to their number. GOD may bless you for His servant's sake.

But again, let me urge you to pray for your pastor.

I am aware that this may seem a very common-place remark, but the act spoken of is no common-place thing. More depends upon this than we have even imagination to conceive of. See with what earnestness the apostles urged the churches to pray for them, showing what an important matter they regarded it! A minister is set up in a prominent position. His every action and movement is watched and talked about. He is

A TARGET

set up for every gossiping and malignant tongue to shoot at. He is a man with like passions with others, exposed to peculiar temptations, and Satan knows that if he can cause him to fall, the injury done to the cause of truth will be very great. We may be sure, therefore, that the enemy will try every hellish dart to bring him down. He needs the prayers of GOD's people as a man, that more than common supplies of grace may be given to him, that he may be an example to the flock, and be of good report to all.

And he needs the prayers of the faithful as a minister, that the HOLY SPIRIT may be with him in his studies and in his public ministrations.

If the HOLY SPIRIT is not with him, his best efforts will utterly fail. The attention of sinners will not be arrested, and their minds will grow darker and their hearts harder, under the preaching of the Word. The church will not be interested as they ought, and the sad spectacle of a listless congregation will be exhibited in the sight of GOD, angels, and men.

Can there be any sight more heart-rending to a truly godly minister, while preaching those great truths that thrill all heaven with delight, than to see some sleeping, some yawning, some gazing vacantly around, and frequently consulting their watches, as if thinking more of their dinner than the great business of the sanctuary?

Yet all this is often seen when the sermon is able and eloquent, and when the best part of the week has been given to its preparation.

Let the SPIRIT of GOD be poured out, and, under the same sermon, what a different state of things! A deep solemnity pervades the house, every eye is fixed upon the preacher, tears stream down many faces, that old hardened sinner trembles so that he can scarcely keep his seat, and that old saint seems ready to shout aloud:

"This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes!" One mighty

WAVE OF SALVATION

rolls over the congregation, and preacher and people separate, feeling that it was good to be there. Such is the state of things that GOD gives to a praying people - to a people that plead and wrestle before GOD in private for their minister.

On this subject Charles G. Finney says: "I have seen Christians who would be in an agony when the minister was going into the pulpit, for fear his mind should be in a cloud, or his heart cold, or he should have no unction, and so a blessing should not come. I have labored with a man of this sort. He would pray until he got an assurance in his mind that GOD would be with me in preaching. I have known the time when he has been in darkness for a season, while the people were gathering, and his mind was full of anxiety, and he would go again and again to pray, till finally he would come into the room with a placid face, and say:

'The Lord has come, and He will be with us.' And I do not know that I ever found him mistaken."

Again he says: "I have known a church bear their minister on their arms in prayer from day to day, and watch with anxiety unutterable to see that he has the Holy Ghost with him in his labors! When they feel and pray thus, oh, what feelings and what looks are manifest in the congregation! They have felt anxiety unutterable to have the Word come with power and take effect, and when they see their prayer answered, and they hear a word or a sentence come

WARM FROM THE HEART,

and take effect among the people, you can see their souls look out of their eyes. How different is the case where the church feel that the minister is praying, and so there is no need of their praying! They are mistaken. The church must desire and pray for the blessing. GOD says He will be inquired of by the house of Israel. I wish you to feel that there can be no substitute for this."

Do not allow yourself to be made a party in any scheme against the pastor.

If, for any reason, a minister's usefulness in a place has come to an end, and it is thought that he ought to leave, that the good of the church requires it, then let the leading men of the church, whom he knows have been his true friends, go to him in a straightforward Christian spirit, and tell him so; and in nearly every instance the separation will be effected without difficulty.

But there are unfortunately in some churches men who will not pursue a straightforward way, if they can find a crooked one. They will wire-pull, and plot, and form parties, and seek the removal of a minister, when the highest interests of the church require that he should remain.

One does it from the mere love of change, another because he has some friend that he wishes to get into the pastoral office, another because some outsider has become offended with the minister, and some because the truth spoken has pinched their consciences.

My dear reader, have nothing to do with these plotters. The whole thing is wicked in its inception and execution. GOD must frown upon it, and will visit with a fearful "Woe" those by whom such offences come.

Let the following statement by one who has had experience in this matter, teach its own lesson. He says:

"Many years ago, I was drawn into a scheme to uproot one of GOD's servants from the field in which He had planted him. I and the men that led me - for I admit that I was a dupe and a tool - flattered ourselves that we were conscientious. We thought that we were doing GOD service when we drove that holy man from his pulpit and his work, and said we considered his labors ended in B-, where I then lived.

We groaned because there was no revival, while we were gossiping about, and criticizing, and crushing, instead of upholding by our efforts and our prayers, the instrument at whose hand we harshly demanded the blessing. Well, sir, he could not drag on the chariot of salvation with half a dozen of us taunting him with his weakness, while we hung on as a dead weight to the wheels;

he had not the power of the SPIRIT, and could not convert men; so we haunted him like a deer, till, torn and bleeding, he fled into a covert to die.

"Scarcely had he gone, when GOD came among us by His SPIRIT to show that He had blessed the labors of His dear, rejected servant. Our own hearts were broken and our wayward children converted, and I resolved at a convenient season to

VISIT MY FORMER PASTOR AND CONFESS MY SIN,

and thank him for his faithfulness to my wayward sons, which, like long-buried seeds, had now sprung up. But GOD denied me that relief that He might teach me a lesson every child of His ought to learn, that he who toucheth one of His servants toucheth the apple of His eye.

"I heard my old pastor was ill, and taking my son with me, set out on a twenty-five miles ride to see him. It was evening when I arrived, and his wife, with a feeling which at least was natural and excusable towards one who had so wronged her husband, denied me admittance to his chamber. She said (and her words were as arrows to my soul):

'He may be dying, and the sight of your face might add to his anguish!'

"'Has it come to this,' said I to myself, 'that the man whose labors had, through CHRIST, brought me into His fold, whose hands had buried me in baptism, who had consoled my spirit in a terrible bereavement, and who had, till designing men had alienated us, been to me as a brother - that this man could not die in peace with my face before him! GOD pity me!' I cried, 'what have I done?'

"I confessed my sin to that meek woman, and implored her, for CHRIST's sake, to let me kneel before His dying servant, and receive his forgiveness. What did I care then whether the pews by the door were rented or not? I would gladly have taken his whole family to my home for ever, as my own flesh and blood, but no such happiness was before me.

"As I entered the room of the blessed warrior, whose armor was just falling from his limbs, he opened his languid eyes and said:

"'Brother Lee! Brother Lee!'

"I bent over him, and sobbed out: 'My pastor!'

"Then raising his white hand, he said, in a deep, impressive voice:

"Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm!"

"I spoke tenderly to him, told him I had come to confess my sin, and bring some of his fruit to him, calling my son to tell him how he had found CHRIST. But he was unconscious of all around; the sight of my face had brought the last pang of earth to His SPIRIT.

"I kissed his brow, and told him how dear he had been to me; I craved his pardon for my

unfaithfulness, and promised to care for his widow and fatherless little ones; but his only reply, murmured as if in a troubled dream, was: "**Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.**"

"I stayed by him all night, and at daybreak I closed his eyes. I offered his widow a house to live in the remainder of her days; but she said:

"I freely forgive you, but my children, who entered deeply into their father's anguish, shall never see me so regardless of his memory as to take anything from those who caused it. He has left us all with his covenant GOD, and He will care for us."

"Those dying words sounded in my ears from that coffin and that grave. When I slept, CHRIST stood before me in my dreams, saying: "**Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.**" These words followed me till I realized fully the esteem in which CHRIST holds those men who have given up all for His sake, and I vowed to love them evermore for His sake, even if they were not perfect.

And since that day, I have talked less than before, and have supported my pastor, even if he is not a 'very extraordinary man.' My tongue shall cleave to the roof of my mouth, and my right hand forget its cunning, before I dare to put asunder what GOD has joined together."

The above narrative was spoken to one who had approached him to help in inducing a pastor to resign; and therefore he added:

"I will not join you in the scheme that brought you here; and, moreover, if I hear another word of this from your lips, I shall ask my brethren to deal with you as with them who cause divisions. I would give all I own to recall what I did thirty years ago. Stop where you are, and pray GOD, if perchance the thought of your heart may be forgiven you."

There are a great many ways in which you can

HELP YOUR PASTOR

in his solemn and responsible work.

A very distinguished and successful minister said that a poor old lady in his church helped him to preach more than all the books in his library. She was always in her place in the house of GOD, and so deeply attentive that she scarcely lifted her eyes from his face from the beginning to the close of his sermon. When he would bring out some sweet promise, or the rich unction of Gospel truth, her countenance would light up with joy, and her whole manner would show that she was enjoying a feast at the banqueting table of GOD. When the weather was depressing, the congregation small, or bodily languor made him feel as if he could scarcely preach at all, the sight of that one hearer's eager and expectant face would rouse up his whole soul. Sometimes in his study, when tempted to take, for the next Sunday, some speculative theme in which he might display his learning, the thought of that old lady would call him back to the rich pastures of the Gospel; for he felt that she would be disappointed of her Sunday feast.

By a punctual attendance upon the prayer meetings of the church, and promptly taking part in the services, you can greatly aid your pastor.

Many stay away from these meetings altogether, and many who attend embarrass the pastor very much by their way of conducting themselves. They will come late, skulk away into some corner as much out of sight as possible, see the meeting dragging along for want of someone to take part, and yet keep their seats, and do nothing to promote the interest of the meeting. And yet such persons will be the first to complain of the meetings being dull. Now, anything that is worth doing at all, is worth doing well.

Go to the meeting early. Go forward near where the pastor is, as if you felt identified with the people of GOD and with the welfare of Zion. Do not allow long pauses to throw a damper upon the meeting, but be ever ready to speak and pray, and encourage others to do the same, so that the whole time of the meeting may be taken up. All this will cheer and comfort the pastor, and what is far more important it will secure the approval of the gracious SAVIOUR, who, from His lofty seat in the heavens, is looking down to see how you seek to do His will.

When your pastor feels it his duty faithfully to expose the sins of professors, and pointedly speak to sinners, sustain him in it, even when the Word condemns yourself. He is GOD's servant, and at the peril of his soul he must preach what his Master bids him.

A minister was once asked not to preach so hard, for if he did, certain persons would leave the church.

"Is not the preaching true?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Does not GOD bless it?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever see the like of this work before in this place?"

"No, I never did."

"Well," said the minister, "the devil has sent you to me, to get me to let down the tone of my preaching so as to ease the minds of the ungodly."

The man took the rebuke like a good man, and never afterward complained of plain preaching.

~ end of chapter 5 ~