

## "Publicly and from house to house"

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The sentence which we have just penned is taken from Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus, as recorded in Acts 20. It is a very suggestive sentence, and sets forth in a most forcible manner the intimate connection between the work of the teacher and that of the pastor. "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," says the blessed apostle, "but have showed you and have taught you publicly, and from house to house. "

Paul was not only an apostle, he combined, in a striking way, the evangelist, the pastor and the teacher. The two last named are closely connected, as we see from Eph. 4: 11. It is important that this connection be understood and maintained. The teacher unfolds truth; the pastor applies it. The teacher enlightens the understanding; the pastor looks to the state of the heart. The teacher supplies the spiritual nutriment; the pastor sees to the use that is made of it. The teacher occupies himself more with the Word; the pastor looks after the soul. The teacher's work is for the most part public; the pastor's work, chiefly in private. When combined in one person, the teaching faculty imparts immense moral power to the pastor, and the pastoral element imparts affectionate tenderness to the teacher.

The reader must not confound a pastor with an elder or bishop. The two are quite distinct. Elder and bishop are frequently interchangeable, but pastor is never confounded with either. Elder is a local charge; pastor is a gift. We have nothing about elders or bishops in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, or Ephesians 4, though in these Scriptures we have the fullest unfolding of the subject of gifts. We must carefully distinguish between gift and local charge. Elders or bishops are for rule and oversight. Teachers and pastors are to feed and edify. An elder may be a teacher or pastor, but he must keep the two things distinct. They rest upon a different footing altogether, and are never to be confounded.

However, our object in this brief article is not to write a treatise on ministry, or to dwell elaborately upon the difference between spiritual gift and local charge, but simply to offer to our readers a few words on the immense importance of the pastoral gift in the Church of God, in order that they may be stirred up to earnest prayer to the great Head of the Church, that He may graciously be pleased to shed forth this precious gift more abundantly in our midst. We are not straitened in Him. The treasury of spiritual life is not exhausted; and our Lord Christ loves His Church, and delights to nourish and cherish His body, and to *supply* its every need out of His own infinite fullness.

That there is urgent need of pastoral care throughout the Church of God, few can deny who know what pastorship is, and who are at all acquainted with the true condition of the Church. How rare is the true spiritual pastor! It is easy to take the name, and assume the office; but, in point of fact, pastorship is neither a name nor an office, but a living reality — a divinely-imparted gift — something communicated by the Head of the Church for the growth and blessing of His members. A true pastor is a man who is not only possessed of a real spiritual gift, but also animated by the very affections of the heart of Christ toward every lamb and sheep of His blood-bought flock.

Yes, we repeat it, "*every* lamb and sheep." A true pastor is a pastor all over the world. He is one who has a heart, a message, a ministry, for every member of the body of Christ. Not so the elder or bishop. His is a local charge, confined to the locality in which such charge is entrusted. But the pastor's range is the whole Church of God, as the evangelist's range is the wide, wide world. In New York, in London, in Paris, or Canton, a pastor is a pastor, and he has his blessed work everywhere. To imagine a

pastor, confined to a certain congregation to which he is expected to discharge the functions of evangelist, teacher, elder, or bishop, is something altogether foreign to the teaching of the New Testament.

But how few real pastors are to be found in our midst! How rare is the pastor's gift, the pastor's heart! Where shall we find those who duly combine the two grand and important elements contained in the heading of this paper — "Publicly and from house to house"? A man may, perhaps, give us a brief address on the Lord's day, or a lecture on some week-day; but where is the "house to house" side of the question? Where is the close, earnest, diligent looking after individual souls day by day? Very often it happens that the public teaching shoots completely over the head; it is the house to house teaching that is sure to come home to the heart. How frequently it happens that something uttered in public is entirely misunderstood and misapplied, until the loving pastoral visit during the week supplies the true meaning and just application.

Nor is this all. How much there is in a pastor's range that the public teacher never can compass! No doubt public teaching is most important; would that we had many times more of it than we have. The teacher's work is invaluable, and when mellowed by the deep and tender affection of a pastor's heart, can go a great way indeed in meeting the soul's manifold necessities. But the loving pastor who earnestly, prayerfully, and faithfully goes from house to house, can get at the deep exercises of the soul, the sorrows of the heart, the puzzling questions of the mind, the grave difficulties of the conscience. He can enter, in the profound sympathy of an affectionate heart, into the thousand little circumstances and sorrows of the path. He can kneel down with the tried, the tempted, the crushed, and the sorrowing one before the mercy-seat, and they can pour out their hearts together, and draw down sweet consolation from the God of all grace and the Father of mercies.

The public teacher cannot do this. No doubt, if, as we have said, he has something of the pastoral element in him, he can anticipate in his public address a great deal of the soul's private exercises, sorrows, and difficulties. But he cannot fully meet the soul's individual need. This is the pastor's holy work. It seems to us that a pastor is to the soul what a doctor is to the body. He must understand disease and medicine. He must be able to tell what is the matter. He must be able to discern the spiritual condition to apply the true remedy. Ah, how few are these pastors! It is one thing to take the title and another thing to do the work.

Christian reader, we earnestly entreat you to join us in fervent believing prayer to God to raise up true pastors amongst us. We are in sad need of them. The sheep of Christ are not fed and cared for. We are occupied so much with our own affairs, that we have not time to look after the beloved flock of Christ. And even on these occasions, when too Lord's people assemble in public, how little there is for their precious souls! What long barren pauses and silence of poverty! What aimless hymns and prayers we hear! How little leading of the flock through the green pastures of Holy Scripture, and by the still waters of divine love! And then, all through the week, few loving pastoral calls, few tender solicitous inquiries after soul or body. There seems to be no time. Every moment is swallowed up in the business of providing for ourselves and our families. It is, alas! the old sad story; "All seek their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's."

How different it was with the blessed apostle. He found time to make tents, and also to "teach publicly and from house to house." He was not only the earnest evangelist, ranging over continents and planting churches, but he was also the loving pastor, the tender nurse the skilful spiritual physician. He had a heart for Christ and for His body, the Church, and for every member of that body. Here lies the real secret of the matter. It is wonderful what a loving heart can accomplish. If I really love the Church,

I shall desire its blessing and progress, and seek to promote these according to my ability.

May the Lord raise up in the midst of His people pastors and teachers after His own heart — men filled with His Spirit, and animated by a genuine love for His Church — men competent and ready to teach — "*publicly and from house to house.*"