

ter, for as such the administration of the gospel is committed unto him, as unto all the ends of it, whereof the chief, as was said, is the conversion of souls; yea, of such weight it is that the conveniency and edification of particular churches ought to give place unto it. When, therefore, there are great opportunities and providential calls for the preaching of the gospel unto the conversion of souls, and, the harvest being great, there are not labourers sufficient for it, it is lawful, yea, it is the duty of pastors of particular churches to leave their constant attendance on their pastoral charge in those churches, at least for a season, to apply themselves unto the more public preaching of the word unto the conversion of the souls of men. Nor will any particular church be unwilling hereunto which understands that even the whole end of particular churches is but the edification of the church catholic, and that their good and advantage is to give place unto that of the glory of Christ in the whole. The good shepherd will leave the ninety and nine sheep, to seek after one that wanders; and we may certainly leave a few for a season, to seek after a great multitude of wanderers, when we are called thereunto by divine providence: and I could heartily wish that we might have a trial of it at this time.

The ministers who have been most celebrated, and that deservedly, in the last ages, in this and the neighbour nations, have been such as whose ministry God made eminently successful unto the conversion of souls. To affirm that they did not do their work as ministers, and by virtue of their ministerial office, is to cast away the crown and destroy the principal glory of the ministry. For my own part, if I did not think myself bound to preach as a minister, and as a minister authorized in all places and on all occasions, when I am called thereunto, I think I should never preach much more in this world. Nor do I know at all what rule they walk by who continue public constant preaching for many years, and yet neither desire nor design to be called unto any pastoral office in the church. But I must not here insist on the debate of these things.

6. It belongs unto them, on the account of their pastoral office, to be *ready, willing, and able, to comfort, relieve, and refresh, those that are tempted*, tossed, wearied with fears and grounds of disconsolation, in times of trial and desertion. "The tongue of the learned" is required in them, "that they should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." One excellent qualification of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the discharge of his priestly office now in heaven, is, that he is touched with a sense of our infirmities, and knows how to succour them that are tempted. His whole flock in this world are a company of tempted ones; his own life on the earth he calls "the time of his temptation;" and those who have the charge of his flock under him ought to have a sense of their infirmities, and endeavour in an especial manner to succour them that are tempted.

But amongst them there are some always that are cast under darkness and disconsolations in a peculiar manner: some at the entrance of their conversion unto God, whilst they have a deep sense of the terror of the Lord, the sharpness of conviction, and the uncertainty of their condition; some are relapsed into sin or omissions of duties; some under great, sore, and lasting afflictions; some upon pressing, urgent, particular *occasions*; some on sovereign, divine *desertions*; some through the *buffetings of Satan* and the injection of blasphemous thoughts into their minds, with many other occasions of an alike nature. Now, the troubles, disconsolations, dejections, and fears, that arise in the minds of persons in these exercises and temptations are various, oftentimes urged and fortified with subtile arguings and fair pretences, perplexing the souls of men almost to despair and death. It belongs unto the office and duty of pastors,—

(1.) To be able *rightly to understand the various cases that will occur of this kind*, from such principles and grounds of truth and experience as will bear a just confidence in a prudent application unto the relief of them concerned; [to have] "the tongue of the learned, to know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." It will not be done by a collection and determination of cases, which yet is useful in its place; for hardly shall we meet with two cases of this kind that will exactly be determined by the same rule, all manner of circumstances giving them variety: but a skill, understanding, and experience, in the whole nature of the work of the Spirit of God on the souls of men, of the conflict that is between the flesh and the Spirit, of the methods and wiles of Satan, of the wiles of principalities and powers or wicked spirits in high places, of the nature, and effects, and ends of divine desertions, with wisdom to make application out of such principles, or fit medicines and remedies unto every sore and distemper, are required hereunto. These things are by some despised, by some neglected, by some looked after only in stated cases of conscience, in which work it is known that some have horribly debauched their own consciences and [those of] others, to the scandal and ruin of religion, so far as they have prevailed. But not to dispute how far such helps as books written on cases of conscience may be useful herein,—which they may be greatly unto those who know how to use them aright,—the proper ways whereby pastors and teachers must obtain this skill and understanding are, by diligent study of the Scriptures, meditation thereon, fervent prayer, experience of spiritual things, and temptations in their own souls, with a prudent observation of the manner of God's dealing with others, and the ways of the opposition made to the work of his grace in them. Without these things, all pretences unto this ability and duty of the pastoral office are vain; whence it is that the whole work of it is much neglected.