

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.

(2.) To be ready and willing to *attend unto the especial cases that may be brought unto them*, and not to look on them as unnecessary diversions, whereas a due application unto them is a principal part of their office and duty. To discountenance, to discourage any from seeking relief in perplexities of this nature, to carry it towards them with a seeming moroseness and unconcernedness, is to turn that which is lame out of the way, to push the diseased, and not at all to express the care of Christ towards his flock, Isa. xl. 11. Yea, it is their duty to hearken after them who may be so exercised, to seek them out, and to give them their counsel and direction on all occasions.

(3.) To *bear patiently and tenderly with the weakness*, ignorance, dulness, slowness to believe and receive satisfaction, yea, it may be, impertinencies, in them that are so tempted. These things will abound amongst them, partly from their natural infirmities, many being weak, and perhaps froward, but especially from the nature of their temptations, which are suited to disorder and disquiet their minds, to fill them with perplexed thoughts, and to make them jealous of every thing wherein they are spiritually concerned; and if much patience, meekness, and condescension, be not exercised towards them, they are quickly turned out of the way.

In the discharge of the whole pastoral office, there is not any thing or duty that is of more importance, nor wherein the Lord Jesus Christ is more concerned, nor more eminently suited unto the nature of the office itself, than this is. But whereas it is a work or duty which, because of the reasons mentioned, must be accompanied with the exercise of humility, patience, self-denial, and spiritual wisdom, with experience, with wearisome diversions from other occasions, those who had got of old the conduct of the souls of men into their management turned this whole part of their office and duty into an engine they called "auricular confession;" whereby they wrested the consciences of Christians to the promotion of their own ease, wealth, authority, and oftentimes to worse ends.

7. A *compassionate suffering* with all the members of the church in all their trials and troubles, whether internal or external, belongs unto them in the discharge of their office; nor is there any thing that renders them more like unto Jesus Christ, whom to represent unto the church is their principal duty. The view and consideration, by faith, of the glory of Christ in his compassion with his suffering members, is the principal spring of consolation unto the church in all its distresses. And the same spirit, the same mind herein, ought, according to their measure, to be in all that have the pastoral office committed unto them. So the apostle expresseth it in himself, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" 2 Cor. xi. 29. And unless this compassion and goodness do run through the discharge of their whole office, men cannot be said