



### A Commentary Addressing the Sad State of Modern Protestant Ministry

**T**HE words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.<sup>12</sup> And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.<sup>13</sup> Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.<sup>14</sup> For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. (Ecclesiastes 12:11-14)

It distresses me to write concerning the state of the modern ministry, but my calling surely compels me to point out error as well as truth. The modern approach to theology is more of the Irenic variety – a theological approach that presumably attempts to address the theology of the church against that of other theologies which may even be heretical, but doing so by giving equal weight and respect to the opposing theology (Islam for example). That category of theology practiced in the Anglican Orthodox Church, and which follows the approach, I believe, of the English Reformers, is Polemic Theology. Polemic theology takes a hard stand on its principles and seeks to reveal the error of opposing theologies. If we believe we are correct in our Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, for example, why would we not valiantly advance them and reveal any perceived errors in those who reject them. This is the Church Militant and it conducts itself as a contestant in the great spiritual battle that is taking place before our very eyes.

The soft and effeminate approach that typifies the mainline pulpits of today is so irenic that it tends to incorporate the errors, against which it has argued, into its own positions. Standing before the wrong tree in Eden has led us to many deceptions.

Pride of ministry leads many young, and I am afraid older, ministers to put more emphasis on the presumed meaning of notable theologians than even the Word itself. Endless hours are spent in studying the most minuscule meanings of the church fathers in determining meanings appropriated to them of which they themselves may not even have been aware. An endless study of Greek and Hebrew languages is offered to better understand the Holy Bible. These studies are valuable but certainly do not equal the scholarship of the King James or Geneva Bible translators. Moreover, those eminent translators used the inspired text from which to translate.

When I go onto Facebook, a necessary evil for our ministry, I find endless diatribes on proper vestments (usually very elaborate) that reflect an inappropriate pride on the part of the clergy. Less essential points of theology are discussed ad infinitum without more than a cursory reference to Holy Scripture.. Our time would be far more profitable in studying Holy Scripture and less on those commentaries written by man. Do not misunderstand: I love the commentaries of the old theologians. I have learned much from them, but I have never failed to compare their writings with Holy Scripture to satisfy my soul that their interpretation is consistent with God's Word.

I had felt called to preach the Gospel of Christ from an early age but could not know in what way the Lord desired me to be an instrument in His Hand. I was well aware of my feeble ability and lack of righteousness. How could He use such a one as me in ministry? As I studied more – not in preparation for the ministry, but out of an unrelenting love of the Word – I came to understand that it was true: I was not worthy to preach the Gospel. In fact, I was not worthy to be called a Christian! It was then that I realized that no man is worthy to be a minister – no person is worthy to be called Christian. It is the merits and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ which makes us worthy. To whatever role He calls us to ministry, He will also make us able to perform it! But it is not OUR work, but the work and toil of the Lord Himself. No personal pride can be taken. We are saved by Grace and not through any works of our own.

The pulpit dandies to which the title of this commentary applies are those men of all ages who have chosen the profession of the Christian ministry as their 'career path' to success. They seek large salaries, an opulent benefits package, and a generous expense account before signing on with the church. They are, essentially, following the money. When we follow the money, we are in bondage to the will of man – not God. These pulpit dandies will say whatever they presume necessary to satisfy the deep pockets of the large donors. They feel no guilt in doing this since their primary objective is to grow the church and thereby grow the payroll. They may even have convinced themselves that this is the will of God. They wear the latest fashions in clothing and footwear and often expensive jewelry. They boast of how greatly the Lord has blessed them. They may make ten times the paycheck of some poor widow in the pews who faithfully tithes of her meager government pension. Is this the work of the Lord? Are these men called of God?

Such pulpit dandies preach strongly on the responsibility to give sacrificially to the church treasury, but little is mentioned about giving to the poor. <sup>31</sup> *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:* <sup>32</sup> *And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:* <sup>33</sup> *And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.* <sup>34</sup> *Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:* <sup>35</sup> *For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:* <sup>36</sup> *Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in*

*prison, and ye came unto me. <sup>37</sup> Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? <sup>38</sup> When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? <sup>39</sup> Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? <sup>40</sup> And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Matthew 25:31-40)*

The words of the Lord above are not the sophisticated words of an Oxford scholar. They are intentionally simple and easy to understand just as all preaching should be in reflecting the simplicity of the Gospel. The objective is to convict – not impress! If we had to do away with the theological teachings of man, or do away with the Gospel, which would we choose? Systematic theology, insofar as it follows the truth outlined in Scripture is a valuable asset, but it would be nothing without the Gospel. Jesus did not preach in outlandish entertainment gatherings. He did not scream and jump about; but taught as one having authority – which He did have. The minister can have authority as well if he preaches the Gospel alone with no mundane emendations. There is no place for the name-it-and-claim-it Gospel, or the prosperity Gospel so prevalent today.

When I hear ministers today refute the principles of the Great Continental or English Reformations, I am distressed in my soul. When I hear young men, right out of seminary, trying to correct the Greek of the Gospels as presented by men such as Lancelot Andrewes who could speak 21 languages and was fluent in 18, I am reminded of a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant trying to correct the military bearing of a Sergeant Major. When I consider men such as Hooper, Latimer, Ridley, Cranmer, Hus and others, who were willing to be burned alive at the stake rather than renounce a single line of Holy Writ, I look at these modern purveyors of error and wonder how far they would be willing to compromise in order to save their hides rather than sacrificing their all for Christ.

Let's reject the pride of words, of academia, of title, and return to the simple preaching of the Gospel as Jesus taught. If we follow in His footsteps, even if we have no pillow upon which to lay our heads, we shall do well. If we are able to make our teaching understandable to both scholar and street-sweeper at the same moment, we will be very close to fulfilling our roles as called out to minister. Pride and hypocrisy are marks of the Pharisees – not Christian ministers.

**I** CHARGE thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; <sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; <sup>4</sup> And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. <sup>5</sup> But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)