

The Reformed Pastor

By Richard Baxter

Introduction:

Baxter's theology is considered controversial while his spirituality and godliness was never questioned. Baxter was considered "combative, judgmental, and pedagogical with his peers.

"A schoolmaster by instinct, Baxter usually called himself his people's teacher, and teaching was to his mind the minister's main task." He was a big believer in teaching the "great fundamental principles of Christianity." He characterized "faith, hope, love, holiness and unity" as the keys to be taught from the pulpit and in personal catechizing.

"To upgrade the practice of personal catechizing from a preliminary discipline for children to a permanent ingredient in pastoral care for all ages was Baxter's main contribution to the development of Puritan ideals for ministry."

By "reformed" Baxter meant "not Calvinistic" in doctrine. "If God would but reform the ministry and set them on their duties zealously and faithfully, the people would certainly be reformed."

"Baxter's book a ministry to ministers... Three qualities: *energy* – its words have hands and feet and they come passionately from the heart and the head. Second, the book has *reality*. It is honest and straight. Any Christian who seriously thinks that without Christ men are lost, and who seriously loves his neighbor, will not be able to rest for the thought that all around him people are going to hell, but will lay himself out unstintingly to convert others as his prime task in life; and any Christian who fails so to live undermines the credibility of his faith, for if he cannot himself take it seriously as a guide for living, why should anyone else?" Baxter went on... "insisting we must be content to accept any degree of discomfort, poverty, overwork, and loss of material good, if only souls might be saved, and setting a marvelously vivid example in his own person." Third, the book is a model of *rationality*. **Baxter makes the point: "unless all the evangelist does makes for credibility his message is not likely to be used much to convince."** Baxter insisted that ministers must preach of eternal issues as men who feel what they say..."

Baxter said: **"When one lives with one foot in the grave, it imparts an overwhelming clarity both to one's sense of proportion, and also to ones perception of what is and is not consistent with what one professes to believe."**

"... cries of conscience are daily ringing in my ears... when laying a corpse in a grave... think with yourselves, here lieth the body; but where is the soul and what have I done for it before it departed? It is a small matter to answer such a question ... now... but the hour is coming when it will not seem so..." (when we will have to answer that question from heaven – in response to our choices/commitments)

"For my part, I study to speak as plainly and as movingly as I can..."

"I know that preaching the gospel publicly is the most excellent means, because we speak to many at once. But it is usually far more effectual to preach it privately to a particular sinner..."

"*The Reformed Pastor* confronts the modern minister with the following questions: 1. Do I believe the gospel Baxter believed (and Whitefield, and Spurgeon, and Paul)? 2. Do I share Baxter's view of the vital necessity of conversion? 3. Am I as real as I should be in letting this view of things shape my life and work? 4. Am I as rational as I should be in choosing means to the end I desire, and am charged to seek? 5. Have I set myself to find the best way of creating situations in which I can talk to my people personally, on a regular basis, about their spiritual lives?"

“A tract given to a poor man may be the means of his conversion; but a work such as this (Baxter’s book), presented to a minister, may, through his increased faithfulness and energy, prove the conversion of multitudes.”

Dedication:

“...when reproofs themselves prove so ineffectual, that they (the person who did the offense) are more offended at the reproof than at the sin, and had rather that we should cease reproofing, than that themselves should cease sinning, I think it is time to sharpen the remedy.”

“To bear with the vices of the ministry is to promote the ruin of the Church; for what speedier way is there for the depraving and undoing of the people, than the depravity of their guides?”

“I speak all this to none but the guilty... I find it will be impossible to avoid offending those who are at once guilty... silent we cannot be, because of God’s commands; and patient they will not be, because of their guilt... For who, that hath a tongue, can be silent, when it is for the honor of God, the welfare of His Church, and the everlasting happiness of so many souls?”

“The first and main work of ministers is the catechizing and instructing of individuals... To that end: people must be taught the principles of religion, and matters of greatest necessity to salvation...; next, they must be taught in the most edifying, advantageous way...; love and care of souls must extend to all...”

“I find that we never took the best course for demolishing the kingdom of darkness, till now.”

“If some refuse your help that will not excuse you for not affording it to them that would accept it.”

“I cannot conceive that he who hath one spark of saving grace and that love to God, who delights to do His will, could possibly be drawn to oppose or refuse such a work as this; except under the power of such a temptation as Peter was when he denied Christ...” “You have put your hand to the plow; you are doubly devoted to him, as Christians, and as pastors; and dare you, after this, draw back and refuse his work?”

“It is easier now to cavil against duty than to perform it: but wait the end, before you pass your final judgment.” “Woe to them (who cavil against duty), when they must account for the blood of souls!” “I am sure my arguments for this duty will appear strongest at the last, when they shall be viewed at the hour of death...”

“Brethren, I earnestly beseech you,... for the sake of your people’s souls, do not slightly slobber over this work, but do it vigorously, make it your great and serious business.”

Baxter was a starch proponent of Church discipline. In his eyes, it was a necessary tool of validation in the Church. Without it, all Christian witness and credibility was tarnished. “... do not willfully or negligently delay it, as if it were a needless thing; nor shrink from it, because of the trouble to the flesh that doth attend it; for that is a sign of hypocrisy... be sure that Christ will bear the cost.”

Baxter also championed the practice of “faithful ministers... uniting for the furtherance of each other in the work of the Lord and the maintaining of unity and concord in his churches.” “Though we teach our people, as officers set over them in the Lord, yet may we teach one another, as brethren in office, as well as in the faith.”

Chapter One: The Oversight of Ourselves

Section One: The Nature of this Oversight

“Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish, while you call upon others to take heed of perishing; and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare food for them.”

“Many have warned others that they come not to that place of torment, while yet they hastened to it themselves: many a preacher is now in hell... Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher.”

“A graceless, inexperienced preacher is one of the most unhappy creatures upon earth: and yet he is ordinarily very insensible of his unhappiness; for he hath so many counters that seem like the gold of saving grace, and so many stones that resemble Christian jewels, that he is seldom troubled with the thoughts of his poverty; but thinks he’s rich, when he is poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.”

“Oh what aggravated misery is this, to perish in the midst of plenty!”

“Nothing can be rightly known, if God be not known; nor is any study well managed, nor to any great purpose, if God be not studied.”

“...the most holy men are the most excellent students of God’s works.”

“This is the sanctification of your studies, when they are devoted to God, and when he is the end, the object, and the life of them all.”

“...no man that hath not the vitals of theology, is capable of going beyond a fool in philosophy. Theology must lay the foundation, and lead the way of all our studies.” “If you see not yourselves and all things, as living, and moving, and having being in God, you see nothing, whatever you think you see.”

“Speak daily those things that must be wrought into their hearts, or else they are undone. Let some piercing words fall frequently from your mouths, of God and the state of their souls, and the life to come. You little know the impressions they may make.”

“Content not yourselves with being in a state of grace, but be also careful that your graces are kept in vigorous and lively exercise, and that you preach to yourselves the sermons which you study, before you preach them to others. When your minds are in a holy, heavenly frame, your people are likely to partake of the fruits of it... that which is most on your heart is like to be most in their ears. **We are the nurses of Christ’s little ones.** If we forbear taking food ourselves, we shall famish them... If we let our love decline, we are not likely to raise up theirs... - if you make not this a work to which you constantly attend, all will go wrong.”

“Above all, be much in secret prayer, (fasting), and meditation.”

“If a pang of spiritual pride should overtake you, and vent your own inventions to draw away disciples after you, what a wound may this prove to the Church... Vanity and error will slyly insinuate, and seldom come without fair pretences: great distempers and apostasies have usually small beginnings. The prince of darkness doth frequently personate an angel of light, to draw the children of light again into darkness.”

“Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling blocks before the blind... lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labors. This is the way to make men think the Word of God is but an idle tale.”

“He that means what he speaks will surely do as he speaks. One proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon, and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing.”

“...if we will be the servants of Christ indeed, we must not be tongue servants only, but must serve him with our deeds, and be doers of the work, that we may be blessed in our deed. A practical doctrine must be practically preached. We must study as hard how to live well, as how to preach well.”

“There are no virtues wherein your example will do more, than humility, meekness and self-denial.”

“If you believe Christ is more worthy of imitation than Caesar, and that it is more glory to be a Christian than to be a conqueror, set meekness and love and patience against force, and not force against force. Remember, you are obliged to be the servants of all.”

“...abound in works of charity and benevolence. Go to the poor, and see what they want, and show your compassion to their soul and body. Be not strange to the poor of your flock; they are apt to take your strangeness for contempt.”

“Stretch your purse to the utmost, and do all the good you can. Think not of being rich... What if you do impoverish yourselves to do a greater good; will this be loss or gain? If you believe that God is the safest purse-bearer, and that to expend in his service is the greatest usury, show them that you believe it.”

“...that man who hath anything in the world so dear to him, that he cannot spare it for Christ, if he call for it, is no true Christian... further, the man who will not be persuaded that duty is duty, because he cannot spare that for Christ which is therein to be expended, is not a true Christian.”

“You lose no great advantage for heaven, by becoming poor: In pursuing one’s way, the lighter one travels the better.”

“Oh what abundance of good might ministers do if they would but live in contempt of the world... this would unlock more hearts to the reception of their doctrine, than all their oratory; and, without this, singularity in religion will seem but hypocrisy; and it is likely that it is so.”

“Will a common measure of holy skill and ability, of prudence and other qualifications, serve for such a task as this? **I know necessity may cause the Church to tolerate the weak; but woe to us, if we tolerate and indulge our own weakness!** Do not reason and conscience tell you, that if you dare venture on so high a work as this, you should spare no pains to be qualified for the performance of it? It is not now and then an idle snatch or taste of studies that will serve to make an able and sound divine. Therefore, brethren, lose no time! Study, and pray, and confer, and practice; for in these four ways your abilities must be increased. Lest you are weak through your own negligence and lest you mar the work of God by your weakness.”

Section Two: The Motives to this Oversight

“Take heed... for you have a heaven to win or lose... Believe it sirs, God is no respecter of persons: he saveth not men for their coats or callings; a holy calling will not save an unholy man.”

“Sin dwelleth in us, when we have preached ever so much against it... and one sin inclineth the mind to more. If one thief be in the house, he will let in the rest...”

“Take heed... because the tempter will more ply you with his temptations than other men. If you will be the leaders against the prince of darkness, he will spare you no further than God restraineth him. He beareth the greatest malice to those that are engaged to do him the greatest mischief.” “... he hates the leaders... more that the common soldiers: he knows what a rout he may make among them, if the leaders fall before their eyes.”

“Take heed then brethren, for the enemy hath a special eye upon you.”

“Take heed... lest he outwit you. The devil is a greater scholar than you, a nimbler disputant: he can transform himself into an angel of light to deceive: he will get within you and trip up your heels before you are aware: he will... cheat you of your faith... he will make you believe it is multiplied or increased, when

it is lost. **You shall see neither hook nor line, much less the angler himself, while he is offering you his bait. O what a conquest he hath got, if he can make a minister lazy and unfaithful.**"

"Take heed because there are many eyes upon you, there will be many to observe your falls."

"Take heed... your sins have more hypocrisy in them than other men's... It was a saying of king Alphonsus, that 'a great man cannot commit a small sin.'"

"The nearer men stand to God, the greater dishonor hath he by their miscarriages."

"If you be indeed Christians, the glory of God will be dearer to you than your lives."

"Take heed... for God useth to fit men for great works, before he employs them as his instruments in accomplishing them."

"Sirs, do you think they will be heartily diligent to save men from hell, that be not heartily persuaded that there is a hell? Or to bring men to heaven, that do not truly believe there is a heaven?"

"...all unsanctified men, of whatsoever rank or profession are the servants of Satan, and the subjects of his kingdom; it is he that ruleth in their hearts... O how many such traitors have been in the Church of Christ in all ages, who have done more against him under his colors, than they could have done in the open field. Alas! How many such wolves have been set over the sheep?" – "If there was a traitor among the twelve in Christ's family, no wonder if there be many now."

"Publicans and harlots do sooner enter heaven than Pharisees, because they are sooner convinced of their sin and misery."

"...he can preach against sin at an easier rate than he can forsake it, and another man's reformation may consist with his own enjoyment of his lusts."

"A traitorous commander, that shooteth nothing against the enemy but powder, may cause his guns to make as great a sound or report as those that are loaded with bullets; but he doth no hurt to the enemy. So one of these men may speak as loudly, and mouth it with an affected fervency, but he seldom doth any great execution against sin and Satan. No man can fight well, but where he hateth, or is very angry; much less against them whom he loveth..."

"Although you may know the meat (meal) to be good and wholesome, yet it may make a weak stomach rise against it, if the cook or the server that carrieth it has leprous or even dirty hands."

Chapter Two: The Oversight of the Flock:

Section One: The Nature of this Oversight

"...some persons... though expert in spiritual ministry, go about it in a headstrong manner, and while acting intelligently, tread underfoot any good they do. They teach too hurriedly what can only be rendered holy by meditation... as pastors they walk in paths too rugged for the flock to follow."

"...every flock should have its own pastor, and every pastor his own flock... From this relation of pastor and flock, arise all the duties which they mutually owe each other."

"...flocks must ordinarily be no greater than we are capable of overseeing... God will not lay upon us natural impossibilities."

"Take heed to ALL the flock... We must labor to be acquainted, not only with the persons, but with the state of all our people, with their inclinations and conversations; what are the sins of which they are

most in danger, and what duties they are most apt to neglect, and what temptations they are most liable to; **for if we know not their temperament or disease, we are not likely to prove successful physicians.**”

“Doth not a careful shepherd look after every individual sheep?”

“The prophets were often sent to single men... Paul taught his hearers not only publicly but from house to house: he tells us he warned every man, and taught every man, in all wisdom.”

“But, someone may object, the congregation that I am set over is so great that it is impossible for me to know them all... To this I answer, is it necessity or is it not? If it be not, you excuse one sin by another.”

“I know, what I say will seem hard to some; but to me it is an unquestionable thing, that, if you have but 100 pounds a year (small salary), it is your duty to live upon part of it and allow the rest to a competent assistant, rather than that the flock should be neglected. If you say that you cannot live so meanly as poor people do... can your parishioners better endure damnation, than you can endure want and poverty? ...are the souls of men so base in your eyes, that you had rather they should eternally perish, than that you and your family should live in a low or poor condition?”

“Remember... it is likely they might be brought to knowledge, if they had but diligent instruction and exhortation privately.”

Reflection: Baxter forces us to ask whether our passion and purpose is to assist in the salvation of the lost or if it is in “doing” the “surface work” of God... The latter does the work and puts it out there “for the world to see” and respond to... the former uses a “task orientation” but never expects or accepts “completion” as an option – he sees the forest but remains ever concentrated on the trees! (J.Pearson)

“Dare I, then, let my people live in that ignorance which I myself have told them is damning, rather than put myself and family to a little want? We and all we have are God’s, and should be employed to the utmost for his service. It is inhuman cruelty to let souls go to hell... I might do much to prevent their misery, if I would but a little displease my flesh...”

“While serving all the flock... we must pay special attention to some classes in particular:

1. We must labor, in a special manner, for the conversion of the unconverted... **the work of conversion is the first and great thing we must drive at... the unconverted calleth loudest to us for compassion.**”

I am frequently forced to neglect the further increase of knowledge in the godly, because of the lamentable necessity of the unconverted... Their misery speaks the louder, because they have not hearts to ask for themselves. **Methinks, if by faith we did indeed look upon them as within one step of hell, it would more effectually untie our tongues.**

2. Baxter says it is our duty to encourage people to use the office of the minister as a counseling tool – we are to keep the health and maintenance of their souls in the forefront of *their* priorities. One word of seasonable, prudent advice, given by a minister to persons in necessity, may be of more use than many sermons.

3. We must study to build up those who are already truly converted

a. There are many of our flock that are young and weak... this is the most common condition of the godly.

- Remember: the strength of the Christians is the honor of the Church

- **The world is better able to read the nature of religion in a man’s life than in the Bible**

- It is a most important part of our work, to labor more in the polishing and perfecting of the saints, that they may be strong in the Lord, and fitted for their Master’s service

b. Many labor under corruption, which makes them a trouble to others...

- We must be no more tender of the sins of the godly, than the ungodly

c. **Declining Christians also require special attention**

- We must restore those overtaken in a fault in the spirit of meekness, and yet see that the sore be thoroughly searched and healed, what pain so-ever it may cost.

d. The strong... need our special attention to help them maintain their grace and grow stronger...

4. We must keep a special eye upon families... the glory of both the Church and State depend much on family government and duty. If we suffer the neglect of this, we shall undo all.

Therefore:

a. Get information on how each family is ordered

b. Go occasionally among them, when they are likely to be most at leisure, ask the master of the family whether he prays with them, and reads Scripture, labor to convince such neglect is sin

c. If you find any unable to pray, persuade them to study their own wants, and to get their hearts affected with them... tell them it is their sin and shame that they have lived so negligently as to know not how to speak to God in prayer... explain: prayer should come from the feelings of the heart, and be varied according to our necessities and circumstances.

d. See that every family has 'useful, moving books' besides the Bible and engage them to read...

e. Direct them how to spend the Lord's day... to dispatch their worldly business

- And how to spend time with their family

- The life of religion dependeth much on this...

- Persuade the master of each family to cause his children to repeat the Catechism to him every Sabbath evening & some account of what they learned in church that day

*** You are not like to see any general reformation, till you procure family reformation**

f. We must be diligent in visiting the sick, helping them to prepare for either fruitful life or a happy death

- **Will it not awaken our compassion, to look upon a languishing man, and to think that within a few days his soul will be in heaven or hell?**

- **Even the stoutest sinners will hear us on their death-bed,** though they scorned us before

- **Augustine: 'He cannot die badly who lives well; and scarcely shall he die well who lives badly'**

- A few **things to remember when ministering to men in their last extremity:**

1). **Stay not until their strength and understanding are gone – go to them as soon as you hear they are sick, whether they call for you or not**

2). When the time is so short, **be sure to ply the main points...** promote conversion – showing them the glory of the life to come and the way by which it was purchased for us, and the great sin and folly of their having neglected it in time of health; but yet the possibility that remaineth of their still obtaining it, if they will believe in Christ, the only Saviour, and repent of their sins.

3). If they recover, be sure to remind them of their promises and resolutions in time of sickness... go to them purposely to set this upon their conscience

*** Note: it is very necessary that you go to those whose sickness is not mortal, as well as those who are dying**

g. We must reprove and admonish those who live offensively or impenitently

h. The last part of our oversight... the exercise of Church discipline (after private reproofs)

- In the case of public offenses, when the offender remains impenitent, he must be reprov'd before all, and again invited to repentance

- If any shall say: there is little likelihood that public reproof will do them good: Answer:

1). It ill becomes a creature to implead the ordinances of God as useless...

2). The usefulness of discipline is in the shaming of sin and humbling of sinners

3). What will you do with such sinners – give them up as hopeless? That would be more cruel. Will you use other means? Why, it is supposed that all other means have been used without success; for this is the last remedy.

4). The principle use of public discipline is not for the offender but for the Church, to deter others from like crimes, to keep worship pure

*** Seneca said: 'He who spares the guilty harms the good.'**

- With reproof we must join exhortation of the offender to repentance, and to the public profession of it for the satisfaction of the church
 - 1). **In this duty, we should deal humbly, even when we deal most sharply**
 - 2). **Show the people the commands of God obliging us to do what we do...**
 - Join the prayers of the congregation in behalf of the offender
 - We must be willing to restore the penitent to the fellowship of the church
 - * Charge the church that they imitate Christ in forgiving and in retaining the penitent person; and they must never reproach him with his sins
 - The last part of discipline = the excluding from the communion of the church those who, after sufficient trial remain impenitent
 - * Commonly called ex-communication
 - * The sinner can still be accepted back if he repents and changes his ways...
 - * The minister is to authoritatively charge the people to have no communion with him... It is the people's duty to carefully avoid him
 - * We are to pray for him and be willing to gracefully accept them back
- *** Discipline Summary: Satan obtains a great victory if he gets but one godly pastor to neglect discipline, much more if he gets him to approve of such neglect. Sadly, it seems Satan has got some to scorn at the performers of the duty which they neglect.
- To be against discipline is near to being against the ministry; and to be against the ministry is near to being absolutely against the church; and to be against the church is near to being absolutely against Christ. Blame not the harshness of the inference, till you can avoid it, and free yourselves from the charge of it before the Lord.

Section Two: The Manner of this Oversight

“The ministerial work must be carried on purely for God and the salvation of souls, not for any private ends... **A wrong end makes all the work bad... how good so-ever it may be in its own nature. It is not serving God but ourselves if we do it not for God.**”

“**Self-denial is of absolute necessity in every Christian... doubly necessary in a minister, without it he cannot do God an hour's faithful service.**”

“Hard studies, much knowledge, and excellent preaching, if the ends be not right, is but more glorious hypocritical sinning.”

“Ministerial work must be carried out diligently and laboriously... **Study hard for the well is deep and our brains are shallow...** By avoiding labor and suffering, I shall draw on myself a thousand times more than I avoid.”

“The ministerial work must be carried on prudently and orderly... the foundation must be laid before we attempt to raise the superstructure.”

“**Throughout the whole course of our ministry, we must insist chiefly upon the greatest, most certain, and most necessary truths, and be more seldom and sparing upon the rest. Get them well to heaven, and they will have knowledge enough. The great and commonly acknowledged truths are those that men must live upon.**”

“**I think NECESSITY should be the great disposer of a minister's course of study and labor. If we were sufficient for everything, we might attempt everything, but life is short, and we are dull, and eternal things are necessary... Necessity chooseth my text, and makes my sermons.**”

“Doubtless this is the best way to redeem time, to see that we lose not an hour, when we spend it only on necessary things. This is the way to be most profitable to others, though not always to be most pleasing and applauded, because... as Seneca says: we (people) are attracted to novelties rather than to great things.”

“Hence it is, a preacher must off upon the same things, because the matters of necessity are few... we must clothe the same truths with a grateful variety in the manner of our delivery.”

When choosing what to read for yourself, select “those authors that tell you what you know not, and that speak the most necessary truths in the clearest manner...”

“All our teaching must be as plain and simple as possible. He that would be understood must speak to the capacity of his hearers.”

***** “Truth loves the light, and is most beautiful when most naked.” *****

“It is at best, a sign that a man hath not well digested the matter himself, if he is not able to deliver it plainly to others.”

“Our work must be carried on with great humility. We must carry ourselves meekly and condescendingly to all. **Pride is a vice that ill beseems them that must lead men in such a humble way to heaven.”**

“God, that thrust out a proud angel, will not entertain there a proud preacher.”

“It is this pride at the root that feedeth all the rest of our sins.”

“Too many ministers are too proud to learn. Humility would teach them another lesson.”

“There must be a prudent mixture of severity and mildness both in our preaching and discipline; each must be predominant, according to the matter...”

“We must be serious, earnest and zealous in every part of our work. It is no small matter to stand up in the face of a congregation, and to deliver a message of salvation or damnation... It is no easy matter to speak so plainly that the most ignorant may understand us; and so seriously that the dearest hearts may feel us; and so convincingly, that the contradicting may be silenced.”

“If our words be not sharpened, and pierce not as nails, they will hardly be felt by stony hearts.”

“We must feel toward our people as a father toward his children: yea, the tenderest love of a mother must not surpass ours. They should see that we care for no outward thing, neither wealth, nor liberty, nor honor, nor life in comparison of their salvation.”

“Friendship must be cemented by piety. A wicked man cannot be a true friend. If you be their best friends, help them against their greatest enemies. Think not all sharpness inconsistent with love...”

* Augustine: “Better it is to love even with the accompaniment of severity, than to mislead by (excess of) lenity.”

“We must carry on our work with patience... bear many abuses and injuries from those to whom we seek to do good... many of them will... account us their enemies, because we tell them the truth... we must unweariedly hold on in doing good... in meekness...”

“We have to deal with distracted men who will fly in the face of their physician, but we must not, therefore, neglect their cure. He is unworthy to be a physician, who will be driven away from a phrenetic patient by foul words... sinners are more willing to spit in our faces than to thank us... sadly, many ministers come off under such trials!”

“All our work must be managed reverently... I hate the preaching which tends to make the hearers laugh, or to move their minds with tickling levity, instead of affecting them with a holy reverence of the name of God.”

* Jerome: “Teach in thy church, not to get the applause of the people, but to set in motion the groan; the tears of the hearers are thy praises...”

“All our work must be done spiritually, as by men possessed of the Holy Ghost... They that are so confident that Aristotle is in hell, should not too much take him for their guide in the way to heaven.”

“It is a sign of a false, self-seeking heart, that can be content to be still doing, and yet see no fruit of his labor... (however) God seldom blesseth any man’s work whose heart is set upon the success of it.”

“Our whole work must be carried on under a deep sense of our own insufficiency, and of our entire dependency on Christ. Prayer must carry on our work as well as preaching: he preacheth not heartily to his people, that prayeth not earnestly for them.”

“We must be very studious of union and communion among ourselves... abhor the arrogance of them that tear the Church under the pretence of obviating errors and maintaining the truth...”

“We must avoid the madness formally among theologians who tear their brethren as heretics, before they understand them... **we must learn to see the true state of controversies and then reduce them to the very point where the difference lieth...**”

Section Three: Motives to the Oversight of the Flock

“Our relationship to the flock is that of overseer... by your own undertaking all this work is laid upon you. **Consider what a great honor it is to be the ambassadors of God, and the instruments of men’s conversion...** there are many other excellent privileges of the ministerial office to encourage you...”

“By your work you are related to Christ, as well as the flock. You are stewards of his mysteries, and rulers of his household...”

“You that draw back from painful, displeasing, suffering duties, and put off men’s souls with ineffectual formalities, do you think this is honorable treatment of Christ’s spouse? Do you think so basely of the Church of God, as if it deserves not the best of your care and help?”

“What a great honor it is to be a door-keeper in the house of God!”

“Let us hear these arguments of Christ, whenever we feel ourselves grow dull and careless: Did I die for these souls, and wilt not thou look after them? Were they worth my blood, and are they not worth thy labor? Did I come down from heaven to earth, to seek and save that which was lost; and wilt thou not go next door, or street, or village, to seek them? How small is thy condescension and labor compared to mine!”

Chapter Three: Application:

Section One: The Use of Humiliation

“One of our most heinous and palpable sins is Pride... it is more hateful and inexcusable in us than in other men. Yet it is so prevalent in some of us, that it chooseth our company, it formeth our countenances, it putteth the accent and emphasis upon our words... Pride... polluteth rather than polisheth...”

“Too many of us would be Popes ourselves, and have all stand to our determination, as if we were infallible”

“We have dishonored ourselves by idolizing our honor.”

“The very design of the gospel is to abase us; and the work of grace is begun and carried on in humiliation. **Humility is not a mere ornament of a Christian, but an essential part of the new creature.**”

“...the nature of grace consists in humility, it is a great absurdity to be proud of it.”

“A proud preacher of humility is at least a self-condemning man.”

“Woe to him that takes up the fame of godliness instead of godliness!”

“If we are duly devoted to our work, we should not be so negligent in our studies. **Few men are at the pains that are necessary for the right informing of their understanding, and further work.**”

“If we were heartily devoted to our work, it would be done more vigorously, and more seriously... **How few ministers do preach with all their might... Remember they must be awakened or damned, and that a sleepy preacher will hardly awaken drowsy sinners.**”

* **“Speak to your people as to men that must be awakened, either here or in hell.”**

“Let us rouse up ourselves to the work of the Lord, and speak to our people as for their lives, and save them as by violence, pulling them out of the fire. **Satan will not be charmed out of his possession: we must lay siege to the souls of sinners...**”

“We must see that our sermons be all convincing, and that we make the light of Scripture and Reason shine so bright in the faces of the ungodly, that it may even force them to see, unless they willfully shut their eyes. **A sermon full of mere words... is but an image or a well dressed carcass.**”

“Another sad discovery... we have devoted ourselves to the service of our worldly interests... 3 instances:

a. The temporizing of ministers... if they look for secular advantages, they suit themselves to the secular power... how generally did the common sort of ministers change their religion with the prince? **Too often, reputation and preferment are our religion and our reward.**”

b. **How common is it for ministers to drown themselves in worldly business?**

c. **Our barrenness in works of charity reflect our worldly interests...**

* Charity do most powerfully remove prejudice, and open the heart to words of piety

* **Brethren do not think that it is ordinary charity that is expected from you, any more than ordinary piety. You must, in proportion to your talents, go much beyond others.**

* If worldly vanities did not blind us, we might see when a public, or other greater good, did call us to deny ourselves and our families

* **A man that preacheth an immortal crown, should not seek much after transitory vanity**

* If this be not serving ourselves of God, and selling men’s souls for our fuller maintenance in the world, what is? Such men are accounted excellent preachers and godly ministers by men... (yet) accounted cruel soul-murderers by Christ...

* **The sin is not small because it is unobserved.**

d. We are sadly guilty of undervaluing the unity and peace of the whole Church.

* How rare it is to meet with a man that smarteth or bleedeth with the Church’s wounds

e. We are sadly negligent in performing acknowledged duties, for example, church discipline.

When a work is like to prove difficult and costly, how backward are we to it, and how many excuses do we make for the omission of it!”

* **What a disadvantage you cast upon your cause... if your principles be better than theirs, and their practice be better than yours...**

* The neglect of discipline hath a strong tendency to delude immortal souls, by making those think they are Christians that are not

Section Two: The Duty of Personal Catechizing & Instructing the Flock...

Part I. Motives to this Duty

Article I. Motives from the Benefits of the Work

“...our duty lies plain before us... catechizing and instructing every one in our parishes... that will submit thereto...”

“The work of conversion consisteth of two parts: first, the informing of the judgment in the essential principles of religion; second, the change of the will by the efficacy of the truth. They will understand a familiar speech, who understand not a sermon.”

“Remember when you are talking to an unconverted, that now you have an opportunity to save a soul”

“The second order of Christian truths have such a dependence upon the first, that they can never be well learned till the first are learned... it is like trying to read before learning how to spell or knowing their letters.”

“When you have instructed them in the principles, they will better understand all you say... without this, you may lose the most of your labor...”

“By distance and unacquaintedness, abundance of mistakes between ministers and people are fomented...”

“...the charge of the pastor requireth personal dealing... It will show men the true nature of the ministerial office, and awaken them to the better consideration of it...”

“I am convinced... people understand not what the work of a minister is, and what is their own duty towards him... Little do they know that the minister is in the church, as a schoolmaster in his school, to teach and take an account of every one... and that ALL Christians must be disciples.”

“If God would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth... then surely it beseems us to offer salvation unto all men, and to endeavour to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. And, if Christ tasted death for every man, it is meet we should preach his death to every man.”

“Reformation is to many of us, as the Messiah was to the Jews. Before he came, they looked and longed for him, and boasted of him, and rejoiced in hope of him; but when he came they could not abide him, but hated him...”

Article Two: Motives from the Difficulties of the Work

“...difficulties must excite to greater diligence in a necessary work.”

“We shall find difficulties both in ourselves and in our people... the difficulties in ourselves:

- a. In ourselves there is much dullness and laziness – sloth will tie the hands of many
- b. We have a base, man-pleasing disposition
- c. Many of us have also a foolish bashfulness, we blush to speak for Christ...
- d. Our fleshly interests make us unfaithful in the work of Christ
- e. We are so weak in the faith that this is the greatest impediment of all
- f. We have commonly a great deal of unskillfulness and unfitness for this work.

*** Now to the difficulties within our people...**

- a. Many of them will be obstinately unwilling to be taught...
- b. Many that are willing are so dull, that they can scarcely learn... therefore they will keep away, as ashamed of their ignorance, unless we are wise and diligent to encourage them.
- c. When they do come, you will find it hard to get them to understand you... if you have not the happy art of making things plain, you will leave them ignorant
- d. Yet, harder will you find it to work things upon their hearts...
- e. Lastly, when you have made some desirable impressions upon their hearts, if you look not after them their hearts will soon return to their former hardness, & their old companions & temptations

Article Three: Motives from the Necessity of the Work

“...some of the general grounds of this necessity...

a. This duty is necessary for the glory of God... if we can increase the number or strength of the saints, we shall thereby increase the glory of the King of saints...”

*** ...most have an ungrounded trust in Christ, hoping that he will pardon, justify, and save them, while the world hath their hearts, and they live to the flesh. And this trust they take for justifying faith...**

* ...how can you walk, and talk, and be merry with such people, when you know their case?

b. This duty is necessary to your own welfare as well as to your people's. This is your work, according to which... you shall be judged...

*** Oh what a dreadful thing is it to answer for the neglect of such a charge... what sin more heinous than the betraying of souls?**

*** The day is near when unfaithful ministers will wish that they had never known the charge of souls**

*** ...clear conscience can say: I lived not to myself but to Christ; I spared not my pains; I hid not my talents; I concealed not men's misery, nor the way of their recovery.”**

*** If you would prepare for a comfortable death, and a great and glorious reward, the harvest is before you...**

Article Four: Application of these Motives

“We have carelessly loitered too long already; the present time is posting away; while we are trifling, men are dying; oh how fast are they passing into another world!”

“Is this all thy compassion for lost sinners? Wilt thou do no more to seek and to save them? Shall they die and be in hell before thou wilt speak to them one serious word to prevent it? Shall they there curse thee for ever that didst no more in time to save them? Such cries of conscience are daily ringing in mine ears...”

Baxter goes into great detail to show that a minister who does not take his responsibilities seriously will be condemned on many fronts... **“Would you have imitated the old world if you had seen the flood that drowned it?”**

*Part II
Objections to this Duty*

“He will be the ablest... divine, that addeth practice and experience to his studies: while that man shall prove a useless drone, that refuseth God's service all his life, under pretence of preparing for it...”

“Duties are to be taken together: the greatest is to be preferred, but none are to be neglected than can be performed... But if there were such a case of necessity, that we could not carry on further studies, and instruct the ignorant too, I would throw aside all the libraries in the world, rather than be guilty of the perdition of one soul...”

“How little difference is there between the pleasure of a long and short life, when they are both at an end! Will it not comfort us more at death, to review a short time faithfully spent, than a long life spent unfaithfully?”

“If you yet seek to please men, you are no longer the servant of Christ”

“I profess I wonder at those ministers who have time to spare... Good Lord! What do these men think on, when so many souls around them cry for help, and death gives no respite...”

“Christ saith, that he that denieth not himself, and forsaketh not all, and taketh not up his cross, and followeth not him, cannot be his disciple... how can these men be fit for the ministry who are enemies to self-denial...”

“...the chief misery of the Church, is that so many are made ministers before they are Christians.”

“It is not we, but Christ who hath made and imposed these laws which you call severe... must God let the souls of your neighbors perish, to save you a little labor and suffering...”

“Christ will not... conceal his seeming hard terms from men to entice them to his service; but he will tell them of the worst, and then let them come or not, as they choose.”

“The willfulness of the people will not excuse us from our duty. If we offer them not our help, how do we know who will refuse it? Offering it is our part, and accepting it is theirs.”

“Write this lesson on your study doors:

What preachers should be...

- a. Our general business – Serving the Lord in all humility and with many tears
- b. Our special work – Take heed to yourselves and ALL the flock
- c. Our doctrine – Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ
- d. The place and manner of teaching – I have taught you publicly and house to house
- e. His diligence, earnestness and affection – I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears. This is that which must win souls, and preserve them
- f. His faithfulness – I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, and have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God
- g. His disinterestedness and self-denial for the sake of the gospel – I have coveted no man’s silver or gold or apparel: yea, these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive
- h. His patience and perseverance – none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus
- i. His prayerfulness – I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified
- j. His purity of conscience – wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men

“Write all this upon your hearts, it will do... more good than twenty years’ study of lower things, which, may get you greater applause in the world...”

“He who knoweth that he serveth a God that will never suffer any man to be a loser by him, need not fear what hazards he runs in his cause...”

Part Three: Directions for this Duty

“Bring your people to submit to this course of private catechizing or instruction...”

“Do the work in such a way as will most tend to the success of it”

“The way to win the consent of people to anything that you propose, is to prove that it is good and profitable for them...” (assuming credibility is established)

* **Reflection: Baxter advocates the secular approach of “Consultative Selling” in ministry**

“It will be very necessary that we give catechism to every family in the parish... that so they may be without excuse...”

“Consider... laying the foundation skillfully is the matter of greatest importance in the whole building...”

The last 19 pages of the book offer a step-by-step guide to personally catechizing individuals and families.