

“Additional Thoughts on Pastoral Ministry” From God’s Prophet Jeremiah

Based on commentary by John Calvin
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As God is the only true teacher of the Church, whoever demands to be heard must prove that he is God’s minister.¹

Two things are required in God’s servants: Knowledge and resolute courage.

Two things are required in God’s servants, even knowledge and undaunted courage; all true pastors must be firmly prepared to discharge their office.²

True pastors obey God’s call, even if there is no visible fruit.

Jeremiah went forth; for he knew that he must obey God’s command whatever might be the result. The same resolution ought to be formed at this day by all the faithful ministers of God. They ought to strive as far as they can to promote the salvation of the people; but still when they see that their doctrine [teaching] succeeds not as they wish, they ought nevertheless to follow their course: why? Because they are always a sweet and good savor to God, whatever may be the results.³

True pastors must not be shaken by the opposition of religious hypocrites.

It is nothing new for hypocrites, who boast that they are God’s people and His Church, to reject His grace and to regard as nothing His servants.⁴

Jeremiah preached to the Jews, who claimed to be the old covenant people of God, for 40 years and beyond. How was Jeremiah’s preaching received by his people? The whole nation refused to hear the truth.⁵ When Jeremiah saw the truth of God thus rejected by the people, how could Jeremiah otherwise than feel weariness at times? They were not only deaf to God’s voice and neglected plain teaching, but also they disregarded the most vehement exhortations.⁶

God yet comforted His servant; for he hence knew, that though he could do no good to his hearers, yet his labor was acceptable to God and not without its fruit: for the truth of God is not only fruitful in the salvation of men, but also in their perdition (2 Cor. 2:15-16). God then shows that there would be no loss to His servant, even though the Jews did not repent; for he would be their judge and denounce by the highest authority their destruction.⁷

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, Vol. I, trans. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 34.

² Vol. I, 355.

³ Vol. I, 405.

⁴ Vol. I., 405.

⁵ Vol. I, 407.

⁶ Vol. I, 406.

⁷ Vol. I, 406-407.

Why God has established the office of pastor—to guide and to rule over His sheep.

A sheep is a silly animal and therefore has need of a shepherd to rule and guide it (Jer. 23:3).⁸

What is a Biblical call to ministry?

If any one wishes for a very short definition of God's call, let him take the following: There is a twofold call; one is internal and the other belongs to order, and may, therefore, be called external or ecclesiastical [i.e., of the church]. But the external call is never legitimate unless it is preceded by the internal; for it does not belong to us to create prophets, or apostles, or pastors, as this is the special work of the Holy Spirit. Though then one be called and chosen by men a hundred times, he cannot yet be deemed a legitimate minister unless he has been called by God; for there are peculiar endowments required for the prophetic, the apostolic, and the pastoral office, which are not in the power or at the will of men. We hence see that the hidden call of God is ever necessary in order that any one may become a prophet, or an apostle, or a pastor. (Jer. 23:21)⁹

External calls by an established church are not always necessary for those who are called to the office of pastor.

It often happens that the [internal] call of God is sufficient, especially for a time. For when there is no Church, there is no remedy for the evil, except God raises up extraordinary teachers. The ordinary call given by the church depends on a well-ordered state of things. Whenever there is a Church of God, it has its own laws, it has a certain rule of discipline; there no one should thrust in himself, so as to exercise the prophetic or the pastoral office, though he equalled all the angels in sincerity. But when there is no Church, God raises up teachers in an unusual way, who are not chosen by men; for such a thing cannot be done, where no Church is formed. (Jer. 23:21)¹⁰

The inward call was the chief thing when the state of the Church was in disorder, that is, when the priests neglected the duty of teaching and entirely departed from what their office required. When, therefore, the Church became disordered, God applied an extraordinary remedy by raising up prophets. But when the Church is rightly and regularly formed, no one can boast that he is a pastor or minister unless he is also called by the votes of men. (Jer. 29:30-32)¹¹ [At this point it is necessary to remind our readers that prior to about 1900, the majority of Christian churches believed, based on their understanding of the teachings of the Bible, that only men were allowed to vote and determine who was or was not to be an elder or pastor in Christ's Church. Women's suffrage in the political sphere led to women's voting in virtually all churches. Since the majority of the voting membership in today's churches are usually women, it is often the women who ultimately determine who is or is not to be a pastor or elder. If the women of the church determine who is called to be a pastor and who is not, are they exercising authority over the men of the church, in violation of God's prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12? This is a question that today's churches must answer Biblically and logically. In

⁸ Vol. III, 134.

⁹ Vol. III, 179.

¹⁰ Vol. III, 180.

¹¹ Vol. III, 459.

the 20th century, after extending to women the power to determine who can or cannot be a church leader through their vote, most denominations began to ordain women to the offices of deacon, elder, and pastor.]

True church government begins in the family.

If private men need to be taught daily in order that they may faithfully rule and guide themselves and their families, what ought to be done by those political rulers who are as it were the fathers of the commonwealth? Sadly, as I have already said, such men usually exempt themselves from the yoke of the faithful. (Jer. 26:10)¹²

Nevertheless, this is the government which God has established in His Church. The apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 11:3: “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God.” The men of Christ’s Church need to be taught daily so that they may fulfill their God-ordained duty of teaching and ruling over their wives, in submission to Christ, who is their Head. Husbands and fathers are shepherds and teachers over their families. And the women of the church are commanded to “quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness” (1 Tim. 2:11). God finds “the incorruptible beauty” of a Christian woman’s “gentle and quiet spirit” to be very precious, just as the holy women of the past who trusted in God behaved, “being submissive to their own husbands,” as Sarah obeyed her husband Abraham, “calling him lord” (1 Pet. 3:4-6).

Wives must do their part, and husbands must take the lead to fulfill their God-given responsibilities. If this God-given order breaks down in the family, the church and society will likewise move from order to chaos, from blessing to curse, from peace to discord, from happiness to misery. Our heavenly Father knows what is best for us, so let us obey Him in everything and take Him at His word!

¹² Vol. III, 322.