

The Oversight of Souls

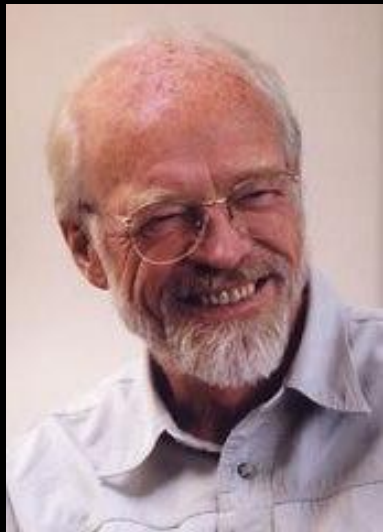
Pastoral Ministry in Southern Baptist and Evangelical Life

Ray Van Neste

SOUTHERN
BAPTISTS
EVANGELICALS
AND THE **FUTURE**
OF DENOMINATIONALISM

Eugene Peterson

(1932-)



“It’s the job of pastors, he added, to know about their sheep and not dump the job on a subordinate. ‘People deserve to have their name known,’ he said. ‘They deserve to have somebody who is a spiritual guide and a preacher and pastor to them and who has had a cup of coffee in the kitchen. There is so much alienation, so much loneliness around us. Classically, that is what a pastor does. We’ve lost that. Of course some people think I’m out to lunch because we don’t do that in America. We do something big and influential and cost-efficient. Well, a pastoral life is not cost-efficient, I’ll tell you. You don’t spend three hours in a nursing home and come away feeling like you’ve been cost-efficient.’”

“Perhaps it is time to screw up our courage and attack the sacred cow: we must admit that simply knowing the contents of the Bible is not a sure route to spiritual growth. There is an awful assumption in evangelical circles that if we can just get the Word of God into people’s heads, then the Spirit of God will apply it to their hearts. That assumption is awful, not because the Spirit never does what the assumption supposes, but because it has excused pastors and leaders from the responsibility to tangle with people’s lives. Many remain safely hidden behind pulpits, hopelessly out of touch with the struggles of their congregations, proclaiming the Scriptures with a pompous accuracy that touches no one.”

-Larry Crabb, *Inside Out*

John 10:11-15 - I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

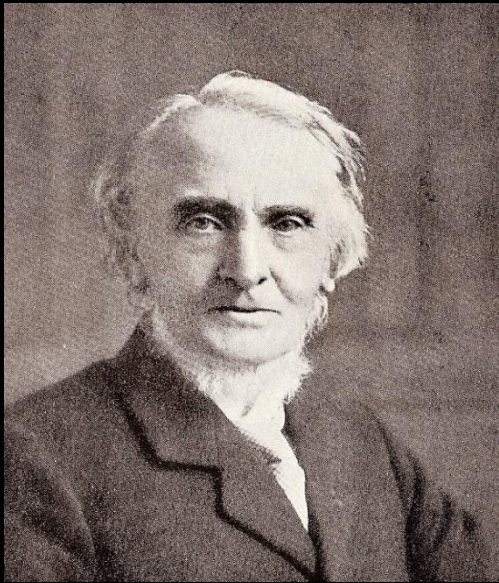
John Chrysostom (347-407)

“A great thing, beloved, a great thing is the role of leader in the Church. It is one that requires much wisdom, and as great courage as Christ’s words indicate: namely, sufficient to lay down one’s life for the sheep; sufficient never to leave them unprotected and exposed to danger; and sufficient to stand firm against the attack of the wolf.”

– *Homily 60, 133*



**Alexander
Maclaren**
(1826-1910)



“Individualising care and tender knowledge of each are marks of the true shepherd. To call by name implies this and more. To a stranger all sheep are alike; the shepherd knows them apart. It is a beautiful picture of loving intimacy, lowliness, care, and confidence, and one which every teacher should ponder. Contrast this with the Pharisees’ treatment of the blind man.”

Heb 13:17 - Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

John Owen

(1616-1683)



*John Owen commenting on Heb
13:17:*

“And the apostle compriseth herein the whole duty of the pastoral office ... ‘The work and design of these rulers [pastors] is solely to take care of your souls,- by all means to preserve them from evil, sin, backsliding; to instruct them and feed them; to promote their faith and obedience; that they may be led safely to eternal rest. For this end is their office appointed and herein do they labour continually.”

**Martin
Bucer
(1491-1551)**

Treatise on pastoral ministry,
*Concerning the True Care of
Souls* (1538)



Refers to a pastor as
Seelsorger, “carer of souls”

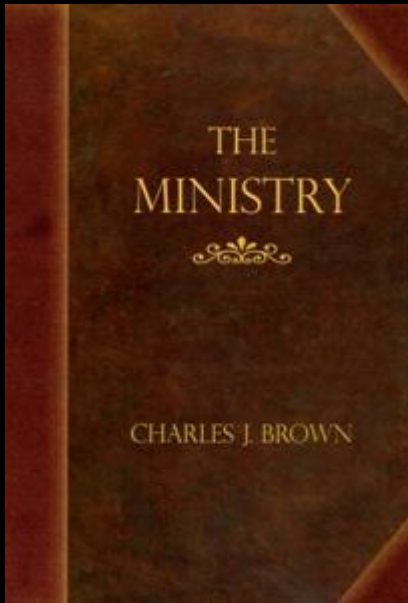
John Erskine

(1721-1803)



“Sermons, like arrows shot at a venture, seldom hit the mark when we do not know the character of our hearers; and, in many instances, our knowledge of their character must be imperfect if we contract no familiarity with them. Yet this, however desirable, is next to impossible in a numerous charge, or in a charge almost continually shifting its inhabitants.”

**Charles J.
Brown**
(1806-1884)

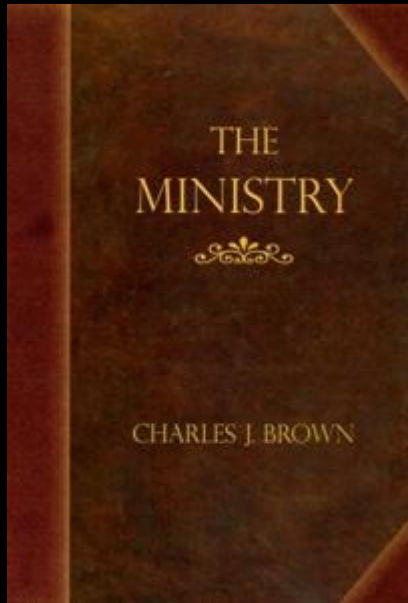


“After a long ministry I do not hesitate to express my belief, that ... the best preaching will lose much of its power without the systematic visiting of the flock at their homes.”

(continued...)

Charles J. Brown

(1806-1884)



(...continued)

“Not only must the minister remain thus a stranger, to a large extent, to their condition and necessities, and so have to preach to them very much at random, but he shall fail of securing that kindly esteem and affectionate confidence at their hands, without which, however he may win their mere respect by his pulpit ministrations, his preaching will probably fail to a great extent of its grand use and end. As the people will most surely bid that minister right welcome to their homes whose voice they hear with joy on the Sabbaths, so will they return with fresh and ever-growing joy to the church, to listen to *his* voice whom they have found the sympathizing friend and counselor of their loved families.”

Silas Aiken

(1799-1836)

“A particular oversight and care of the flock...is involved in the idea of the pastoral work...and can no more be pushed aside or ignored, than any other part.... the man who assumes the sacred office, and, in the neglect of the personal inspection and private instruction of the souls committed to his care, thinks to discharge his obligations by his pulpit labors, is sadly derelict in duty. He sets aside the scriptural model, and sets up a standard of his own devising instead.”

1 Peter 5:1 - So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Acts 20: 18-21, 28 - You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me ... how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.... Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

**Westminster
Directory of
Public
Worship**

(1645)

“It is the duty of the minister not only to teach the people committed to his charge in public, but privately; and particularly to admonish, exhort, reprove, and comfort them, upon all seasonable occasions, so far as his time, strength, and personal safety will permit.”

Richard Baxter

(1615-1691)



“I fear most those ministers who preach well, and who are unsuited to the private nurture of their members.”

1 Thess 2:1, 7-12, 19-20 - For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. ... But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. ...

For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory and joy.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)



“Men who hold the office of the ministry should have the heart of a mother toward the church; for if they have no such heart, they soon become lazy and disgusted, and suffering, in particular, will find them unwilling....

Unless your heart toward the sheep is like that of a mother toward her children- a mother, who walks through fire to save her children- you will not be fit to be a preacher. Labor, work, unthankfulness, hatred, envy, and all kinds of sufferings will meet you in this office. If, then, the mother heart, the great love, is not there to drive the preachers, the sheep will be poorly served.”

Samuel Rutherford

(1600-1661)



“Dearly beloved and longed-for in the Lord, my crown and my joy in the day of Christ, Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ. I long exceedingly to know if the oft-spoken-of match betwixt you and Christ holdeth, and if ye follow on to know the Lord. My day-thoughts and my night-thoughts are of you; while ye sleep I am afraid of your souls, that they be off the rock. Next to my Lord Jesus and this fallen kirk, ye have the greatest share of my sorrow, and also of my joy; ye are the matter of the tears, care, fear, and daily prayers of an oppressed prisoner of Christ.

(continued...)

Samuel Rutherford

(1600-1661)



(...continued)

As I am in bonds for my high and lofty One, my royal and princely Master, my Lord Jesus; so I am in bonds for you....

What could I want, if my ministry among you should make a marriage between the little bride in those bounds and the Bridegroom? Oh, how rich a prisoner were I, if I could obtain of my Lord (before whom I stand for you) the salvation of you all! Oh, what a prey had I gotten, to have you caught in Christ's net! Oh, then I had cast out my Lord's lines and His net with a rich gain! Oh then, well-wared pained breast, and sore back, and crazed body, in speaking early and late to you!

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Samuel Rutherford

(1600-1661)



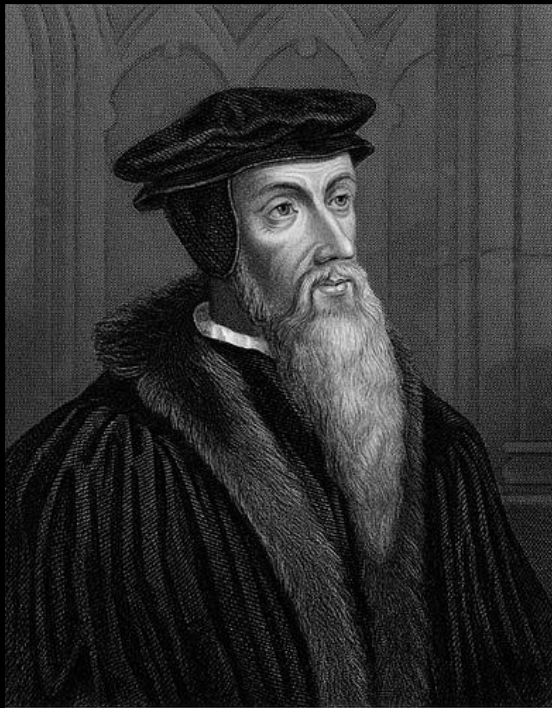
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My witness is above; your heaven would be two heavens to me, and the salvation of you all as two salvations to me. I would subscribe a suspension, and a fristing of my heaven for many hundred years (according to God's good pleasure), if ye were sure in the upper lodging, in our Father's house, before me."

**1 Thess 3:8 - For now we
live, if you are standing
fast in the Lord.**

Col 1:24-29 - Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. **Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.** For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

**John
Calvin
(1509-1564)**



“The office of a true and faithful minister is not only publicly to teach the people over whom he is ordained to pastor, but, so far as may be, to admonish, exhort, rebuke, and console each one in particular.”

“A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland” (1611)

XVI:

“That the members of every church or congregation ought to know one another, so they may perform all the duties of love to one another, both spiritually and physically. (Matt. 18:15; 1 Thes. 5:14; 1 Cor. 12:25)

And especially the elders ought to know the whole flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers. (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3)

Therefore a church ought not to consists of such a multitude that each member cannot have individual knowledge of one another.”

Henry Scougal

(1650-1678)



“But certainly the greatest and most difficult work of a minister is in applying himself particularly to the various persons under his charge; to acquaint himself with their behavior and the temper of their souls; to redress what is amiss and prevent their future miscarriages. Without this private work, his other endeavors will do little good.”

“Now this supposes a great deal of care, to acquaint ourselves with the humors and conversation of our people; and the name of ‘watchmen’ that is given to us implies no less.”

Richard Baxter

(1615-1691)



“But our second concern must also be for *individuals* in the church. We need therefore to know every person that belongs to our charge. For how can we take heed to them unless we know them? We should know completely those in our flock. As a careful shepherd looks after every individual sheep, or as a good schoolmaster looks after every individual student, or as a good doctor knows each of his patients – in these ways we should know them. Christ Himself, the great and good Shepherd, takes care of every individual...”

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) cont.

“We, too, must give an account of our watch over the souls of all that are bound to obey us (Hebrews 13:7). Many more passages of Scripture assure us that it is our duty to take heed to every individual person that is in our flock. And many passages in the ancient church council do plainly tell us that it was also the practice in those days to do likewise. In one passage, Ignatius says, ‘Let assemblies be often gathered; inquire into all by name, despise not servant-men or maidens.’ So you see it was then taken as a duty to look upon every member of the flock by name, even if it should be the meanest servant-man or maid.”

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) cont.

“A faithful pastor should have his eyes on them all. He should labor to know each person’s natural temperament, their situations, and the context of their affairs in the world. A pastor should be aware of the company they live with and deal with, so that he may know where their temptations lie. Thus he knows speedily, prudently, and diligently how to help them.”

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) cont.

In summing up his book Baxter gives 20 points on the benefits of attending to each individual in the congregation. In this context he makes these statements:

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) cont.

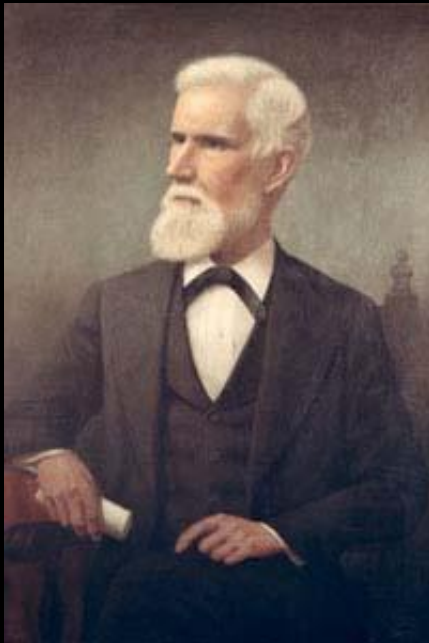
“But when a minister does not know his own people, he is not able to really minister to them.

By means of such personal ministry we come to be better acquainted with each one’s spiritual state. Then we know better how to watch over them and relate to them.”

“They should see us not as simply necessary for their emergency situations. They should see themselves as disciples or scholars who are being taught by their pastors through personal advice and given help for their salvation.”

Patrick Hues Mell

(1814-1888)



“ ‘Very much of his power as a preacher lay in the way he had of getting close to his people. His custom was to visit *all* of them, and so anxious were they not to miss the expected pleasure that he made engagements ahead often as far as three months. The humblest householder was glad to entertain ‘Brother Mell,’ and the same ease of manner characterized him whether he sat at the bountiful board of the rich, or broth the plain bread and partook of the cup of milk from the pine table of the poorest. . . . If a poor man was harassed with debt, broken hearted over a willful child, or bowed down with bereavement, he never felt his load to be quite so heavy after he had talked it over with ‘Brother Mell.’ ”

Hezekiah Harvey

(1821-1893)

“The care of souls is the radical idea of the pastor’s office. he is a shepherd to whom a flock has been committed to guide, to fee, to defend; and the divine command enjoins: ‘Take heed to *all* the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers’ (Acts 20:28). he is to be the personal religious guide, the confidential Christian friend, of his charge. Our Lord, in his description of the Good Shepherd, said, ‘The sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before the, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice’ (John 10: 3-4)

(continued...)

(continued...)

**Hezekiah
Harvey**
(1821-1893)

Each member of his flock is a soul entrusted to his care by the Lord; and if true to his trust, he is one of those who 'watch for souls as they must give account.' Paul, when in Ephesus, taught not only publicly, but 'from house to house;' and in his farewell charge to the elders of that city he said, 'Watch, and remember that, by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every man night and day with tears' (Acts 20:31)."

**Charles B.
Williams**
(1869-1952)



“[he] believed strongly in a pastor’s knowing personally every member in his church, and he had a very active plan of visitation of every family in their home every few weeks.”

-from a biographical sketch by his daughter, Charlotte Williams Sprawls

**W.A.
Criswell**
(1909-2002)



“The shepherd tending his flock, the pastor living in love and encouragement among his people, is the picture the New Testament presents of this God-called servant. . . . Prayer, even fervent prayer, is not enough, nor is prayer plus incessant Bible study enough. We must love with our people, minister to our people, encourage, and guide our people. . . . If the pastor would really succeed in his work, let him minister to the needs of his people. . . . the pastor who knows, loves, visits, and ministers to his flock has a place in their hearts sacred forever. . .

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**W.A.
Criswell**
(1909-2002)

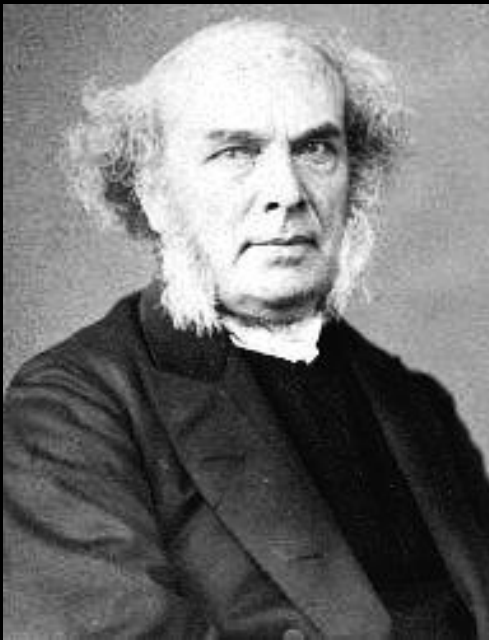


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The example of the great pastors of the world is always one of personal contact with the people. The pulpit is the throne of the preacher, but the throne is not stable unless it rests on the affections of the people. To win the affections of the people, you must visit with them and know them and talk to them and let them talk to you. The man with whom you have wisely and tenderly conversed on vital, personal religion cannot turn a cold, critical ear toward you on the Lord's Day, nor does he. The man who visits has the love of the people."

Horatius Bonar

(1808-1889)



“To this extent the office of the elder and the minister is the same. The design of both is *the oversight of souls*. . . .

Oh! Remember, then, that it is for the care of souls that you have been now ordained; it is for souls that you are to labour, and watch, and pray; and it is for souls that you are to give an account when the great Shepherd shall appear.”