

1 Corinthians 9: 1-18; “A Minister’s Hope Strengthened” A Devotional for the Mid-West Reformed Baptist Association Meeting, held at Grace Reformed Baptist Church of Rockford, Illinois, on July 16th, 2013, and Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall.

Having searched my mind and heart as to what would be encouraging and edifying to you, my fellow-pastors, I have thought awhile upon this text, which speaks about the hope of the Christian minister. Verse 10 says, “He who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope.” For just a few minutes we want to think about that in order to encourage ourselves, and our congregations in the good work to which we have been called. In these verses Paul is speaking to the church of Corinth about his Apostolic right to be supported by the churches in his preaching of the gospel. In verse 12, he asks, “If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more?” “Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.” Preaching the gospel without charge was the policy used by the great Apostle, so that he “might not abuse his authority in the gospel”, he says in verse 18. We know that he certainly believed in ministers being paid for their labors for he says so in verse 14 – “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.” My brothers, most of us here today are paid ministers of the gospel and the Word of God, and therefore we presently have the support of our congregation. Therefore we ought to be laboring in hope all the more. We have been given time by the Lord, and support of our congregations to engage in the labors that are listed for us here, and so I would stir you up to hope in the Lord for greater success in your respective ministries. Let me remind you, very briefly, of 3 things to which you have been called. You have been called to wage war spiritually in hope. And you have been called to plant, or cultivate a vineyard in hope. Actually there is a third thing, but we will not have time to go into it today. That is; you have been called to tend a flock in hope. These are the three aspects of what the minister primarily occupies his time with, which are given to us in verse 7. “Who ever goes to war at his own expense?” “Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit?” And, “Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?”

We need to understand, 1st of all, that being a Christian minister, we are called to engage in a spiritual warfare in hope.

Well, what kind of a spiritual warfare is this for the Christian minister? Turn with me over to Ephesians Chapter 6, verse 10 – “Finally my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts in heavenly places.” You can see from these verses that we are called to be strong in the Lord’s power, not in our own. You can see that we are not wrestling with flesh and blood; that is, that our fight is not directly against people either inside or outside of our church. Therefore, we are not to see the people in our congregation as our enemies. You may see them as hindering you in certain ways. It is rather the Devil that you are fighting, as he attempts to deceive and mislead many. His schemes are trying to overthrow your good work altogether; that is pastor and people learning to work together. Turn with me over to 2 Corinthians 10: 1 – “Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you.” “But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.” “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.” “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,

casting down arguments, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.” You can see here how gently Paul dealt with the people in this church, being lowly in his attitude of mind among them, yet bold toward them when absent in his letters, to assert to them the truth of the Word of God. His object in his spiritual warfare was not to needlessly offend them, or drive them to all of his own personal conclusions over all spiritual matters, but rather to convey God’s Word faithfully; to tear down the strongholds of falsehood and error, all the lofty arguments of people which are either satanically inspired false doctrines, or thoughts and ways of living which were motivated by fleshly or worldly considerations, which unbelievers and even some Christians might be lifting up against the knowledge of God. Paul’s primary focus in spiritual warfare was attempting to bring Christians to the place where they would be held captive in their minds by Christ’s perfect and complete obedience to God’s holy law. In order to be strong as ministers we need to see that this exercise of hope in relation to the Lord’s work will help us in regard to ourselves first, in our attitude toward our people. Dwell often, in your own mind, on Christ’s perfection in His obedience to God. Remember that His sufferings were not only for your sins; that is having as a helmet the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5: 8), but Christ also suffered in order that you would see certain and definite spiritual results in your ministry; fruits which He will bring, in relation to your faithful labors. Remember that He is changing and transforming you to be more like Him. He will be leading you into many and various situations. Yes, you will see your own sinful failures as you examine your own heart, but the strengthening of your heart to do the work of God, or to see others engage in it, does not come from that, but it comes in your beholding Christ as having been self-denying, loving, always speaking the truth in the right way, always pure, always holy without being self-righteous. Behold Him by faith in this way, and you will be lifted up in your ministry. You will have real hope of success in spiritual battle, and be of real help to those in your congregation who are downcast because they see their own remaining corruption so well.

2nd- You as a pastor are called to plant or tend a vineyard.

Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Now, we know that some men plant churches, and all who are in an on-going fixed and stated ministry labor in plowing, sowing, cultivating, and reaping spiritual things in relation to the people that they are ministering to. Ministers are here referred to as oxen and plowmen and threshers in verses 9 and 10. Paul is saying that it will be greatly beneficial to the furtherance of Christ’s kingdom, both in our hearts and the hearts of those to whom we preach, if we are hopeful as we engage in this good work to the glory of God. “He who plows should plow in hope.” “He who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. This is the whole church working together in supporting the minister’s efforts, not just materially, but in encouraging him in his labors in the word. Verse 11 says, We are sowing spiritual things for you...” Let us remember that we are the Lord’s oxen. We are called to be laborers in Christ’s vineyard. Christ has put us in the harness. We are plowing in hope; we are planting and sowing spiritual things upon the ground of people’s hearts. Our help and our hope comes from persevering in what God has called us to do; being faithful in giving ourselves to the Word of God and prayer. Then the Lord, as we exercise our faith in Him in regard to all of our preparations to preach, and in the delivery of our sermons, and in the interaction with our people over these blessed truths of the Bible, He will indeed bless us as we hope in Him. We are treading out the corn in the study, the truth of God’s Word which is made into bread to feed the people of God. Ours is to give the people their portion in due season. And we are praying over how the seed should be sown. But let us also pray that God would give us wisdom on how we could see fruit from our labors; that is, that our people would become more spiritually minded and obedient to our Lord. Our pattern for this, once again, is found in our

Lord Jesus. John 4: 34-38 – “Jesus said to them, My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work” “Do you not say, “There are still four months and then comes the harvest?” “Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” “And he who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.” Let us indeed exercise the grace of hope as we minister. Speaking of the ministry of preaching about Christ’s and His righteousness being more glorious than the preaching of the law under the Old Covenant, Paul in 2 Corinthians 3: 11 says – “For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.” “Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech. Why? Because the veil is taken away from men’s hearts when they have Christ revealed to them. And the saints as it says in verse 18, all of them with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (I will give you more thoughts on the 3rd point of this subject, perhaps the next time that we gather)

And 3rd - And, “Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?”

You and I are called to oversee a flock as under-shepherds of Christ. Since Christ is the Great and Good Shepherd, and we are under His Shepherding care, even in regard to all of our pastoral ministrations, we should have great hope. The Apostle Peter in 1st Peter 5, verse 2 says, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. This is very encouraging. It gives us every reason to hope. We do not have to be lords over our congregations, always trying to force them to do what we know that they should be doing; we need to oversee them as a shepherd does sheep. They are going to have their problems and needs, and we may grow tired of shepherding, but these verses tell us that we ought to be eager to be of spiritual help to them. We are told that we need to be good examples of the Christian to them in every respect. Our greatest responsibility will be in living out before them, the good example of what it means to be a Christian. This means that we will want to speak with all of them, not just some of them. It will mean that we will want to know what their spiritual state is at any given time. Proverbs 27: 23 says, “Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds; for riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations.” “When the hay is removed, and the tender grass shows itself, and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in, the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field; you shall have enough goats milk for your food, for the food of your household and the nourishment of your maidservants.” If this is so in physical shepherding, it is also true in spiritual shepherding. Know your people, and interact with them privately over spiritual things if you can. Be diligent to know their state; what is going on in their minds, and see how you can nourish them and strengthen them with the spiritual truths that you yourself are learning practically as you follow Christ yourself. Later on, as difficulties of various sorts come, these things that you have instilled in the people of your church, through your teaching and your example, will pay the dividends of giving you the hope that you need to continue on in the ministry. God will bless your perseverance and diligence in regard to your efforts in the ministry when they are accompanied by faith and hope. Why should we plow and thresh in hope? Because we believe in the fear of the Lord being our wisdom. Listen to Proverbs 10: 27 – “The fear of the Lord prolongs days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.” “The hope of the righteous will be gladness, but the expectation of the wicked will perish.” “The way of the Lord is strength for the upright.” We have every reason to hope because we are sowing spiritual things which our Lord wants sown, and He will bless us in that, even as we persevere in following Him closely ourselves.