

## **The Faithful Minister Described**

Micah 3:8

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In Zechariah chapter 4, there appears a vision of two olive trees pouring forth their oil into the golden pipes of the sacred candlestick of the temple. In this remarkable and encouraging prophecy, the Lord declares to His disheartened people that by means of two ordinances He would promote reformation of the true religion in their midst: the office of the magistrate and the office of the minister. In Zechariah's prophecy the Lord would empower Zerubbabel the prince and Joshua the high priest to pour forth their graces, gifts, and energies into the enlightening work of biblical reformation throughout the kingdom of Israel.

Moreover, this imagery of the two olive trees receives further attention in John's prophecy in Revelation 11:4 wherein we find two faithful witnesses prophesying or preaching for 1260 days (which according to prophetic reckoning is 1260 years—a year for a day according to Daniel's 70 weeks wherein 490 days are computed to be 490 years). These two faithful witnesses are also described as "two olive trees." It would seem that the testimony of these two faithful witnesses or "two olive trees" is directed against the gross backsliding and apostasy in the office of the magistrate and in the office of the minister (in confirmation of this the Apostle John identifies the two great enemies used by Satan to persecute the saints of Christ as an ungodly civil government which is the beast that comes from out of the sea and as a corrupt and unfaithful church which is the beast that comes from out of the earth in Revelation 13). Herein is conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit the significance of the offices of magistrate and minister to the reformation of the true Christian Religion within a nation and within the world at large. Apostasy in the offices of magistrate and minister brings persecution against the true Christian Religion. Faithfulness in the offices of magistrate and minister brings reformation of the true Christian Religion. Thus, if we would find our place amongst the two faithful witnesses, our message like theirs and like that of Micah and other faithful prophets must be directed toward a faithful exercise of the office of magistrate and minister and against all corruption and apostasy from the faithful exercise of these offices. Having considered previously the office of magistrate from the prophecy of Micah, let us now turn our attention to the office of minister. I cannot imagine more significant and practical questions than these: Under the ministry of which church, which pastors, which doctrine, which worship, which discipline, and which government should we place ourselves? From which ministers should I receive gospel ordinances (such as the Word and Sacraments)? The spiritual life and growth of ourselves and that of our children depends upon the right answers to such questions. The reformation of the true Christian Religion and even the inauguration of the millennial reign of Christ from heaven is intimately connected to the right answers to these questions.

I direct you to the following main points in the sermon this Lord's Day: (1) The Office of Minister Defined; (2) The Faithful Minister Described; (3) Practical Implications to Consider.

### **I. The Office of Minister Defined.**

A. Before considering how the prophets and priests had corrupted their ministry, it is necessary first to understand the sacred office of minister which has been ordained by the Lord. In other words, you cannot understand the perversion of the office until you first understand the office itself as it was established by the Lord. It is essential to distinguish between the office of minister and the man who occupies that office. Just as we made the distinction between office and person when we considered the civil magistrate, so we must likewise make that same distinction when considering the minister.

1. Turn with me to 1 Timothy 3 as we note this distinction between office and person. In Verse 1 our English version, clearly distinguishes between the "man" who desires to be a bishop or pastor, and the office of a bishop. In Verses 2-7, we find the qualifications of those who are to be placed into the sacred

office of bishop or pastor. This same distinction between office and person is made in the Old Testament with regard to the priesthood (Exodus 30:30).

2. Let us consider one more passage from the New Testament as we elaborate further on the issue of office: Colossians 1:25. Although the word “office” is not used in this verse, nevertheless, the concept of office is clearly in view. Here the Apostle Paul (a minister in the universal visible church and not only an apostle of Jesus Christ) identifies three essential characteristics of the office of minister (whether it be the prophet or priest of the Old Testament or the prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher of the New Testament).

a. First, the office of a minister is a stewardship (here called a “dispensation”). A stewardship was a position of trust within a household in which certain duties were carried out on behalf of the master of the house in faithfully dispensing the owner’s goods as the master saw fit. Paul is simply saying that the office of minister is not his nor any other man’s to order as he may see fit. Ministers are not first and foremost ministers of the church, but ministers of Jesus Christ. Invert that order and you have a sure formula for backsliding from purity of doctrine, worship, discipline, and government. Invert that order and the person holding the office of minister has departed from the lawful office of minister.

b. Second, the office of minister is one of authority in ministering to Christ’s Church (“which is given to me for you”). Ministers have been given the keys of the kingdom for the benefit of Christ’s Church (Matthew 16:19; Matthew 28:19-20). These keys are only and always to be used for the truth and not against the truth (2 Corinthians 13:8) and for the edification of the church rather than for its destruction (2 Corinthians 13:10). If the person holding the office of minister abuses the authority of Christ, he has departed from the lawful office of minister.

c. Third, the office of minister is one of commission (“to fulfil the word of God”). He who holds the office of minister of Jesus Christ is to order his ministry according to the Word of God in doctrine, in worship, in discipline, and in government (Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 4:2). He who occupies the office of minister and departs from this authorized commission from Christ has fallen away from the lawful office of minister.

B. Before we return to our text in Micah chapter 3, let me conclude this section by saying that if we cannot distinguish between the office of a minister and the person holding that office (but rather must always see them as one and the same), we will run into many absurdities in Scripture. The Lord calls certain ones false prophets who yet assume the office of prophet (Matthew 7:15). He calls certain ones false teachers who yet assume the office of teacher (2 Peter 2:1). He calls certain ones false apostles who assume the office of apostle (Revelation 2:2). Although the people of Israel and Judah recognized certain men to be prophets within the visible church, nevertheless, the Lord says He did not send them, or appoint them to that office (Jeremiah 14:14). Dear ones, if we cannot distinguish between the office of minister and the man that holds that office, we will not only be driven to many absurdities, but even driven to such blasphemies wherein we must conclude that even the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians 2 (the supreme pastor of the Romish Church, the pope) is a true and faithful minister of Jesus Christ even though he is in the Church of Christ and yet usurps the authority of Christ to rule in His own Church.

## **II. The Faithful Minister Described (Micah 3:8).**

A. Here in Chapter 3 of Micah, the Lord directs His covenant lawsuit against the leaders (in both church and state) who bear a greater degree of responsibility for the sin and corruption manifested in Israel and Judah (to whom much is given much is required). They occupy offices ordained by God, and yet they have used (or rather abused) the offices of magistrate and minister to their own self-seeking profit and advantage. Rather than endearing God’s bride unto their heavenly Husband and His covenant, the princes, prophets, and priests have scattered the Lord’s bride and sent her into the arms of others gods and lovers. The holy jealousy of the Lord burns against those who have driven His bride from Him. In contrast to the false prophets who

greatly outnumbered Micah (and Micah's contemporary, Isaiah), Micah steps forward in order to give to the people of God the description of a faithful minister.

B. A faithful minister is one in whom the power of godliness is manifested ("But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD" Micah 3:8).

1. That is not to imply that a faithful minister is sinless in life. The ministers of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament were mere vessels of clay with various weaknesses and frailties. Discouraged Elijah fled from Jezebel and cried out that he was the only one left in all of Israel that had not bowed the knee to Baal. Peter denied the Lord three times out of fear. Paul said that ministers are mere earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7) whose sufficiency is not of themselves but of God (2 Corinthians 3:5). Thus, I am not saying a faithful minister is a perfect minister.

2. However, a faithful minister is one whose life is more than a mere profession of the truth, there is evidence of the power of God's Spirit in his conversation and life, marriage and family, ministry and calling (Matthew 7:20; 2 Timothy 3:5; Titus 1:16). That is why the Lord has given certain qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 (most of which address the power of godliness evidenced in his life).

3. Although not every sin or moral failure will make a minister unfaithful, those sins in his life which become scandalous and which he will not diligently seek to overcome or obstinately persists in committing, such sins will make him an unfaithful minister.

4. A minister who is a stranger to prayer and communion with Christ will be one who merely goes through the outward forms of profession of the truth. If the power of godliness is not evident in his life, he will be a mere hypocrite in the pulpit. And woe upon all of us who would ascend into this most sacred pulpit to preach what we have no real love for or diligence to practice ourselves. Give me a minister who evidences the power of godliness in his life, even if he is not be the most dynamic or moving preacher in the world.

C. A faithful minister is one in whom justice abides ("and of judgment" Micah 3:8).

1. He not only evidences the power of the Holy Spirit in his life, but also in his doctrine. The faithful minister loves the whole counsel of God and has been given the grace to preach and teach what is true and testify against and expose what is false. He is gifted by the Spirit to discern truth from error.

2. He recognizes that although his duties as a minister are many, nevertheless, the primary duties of his calling are ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4). Let the minister forsake the pursuit of these two duties and he will prove to be unfaithful in all the rest of his duties.

3. Again a faithful minister is not necessarily perfect in every detail of doctrine, but it's not because he considers details of doctrine unimportant or insignificant (faithful in little, faithful in much).

4. Certainly the extraordinary prophets and apostles of Christ were prevented from uttering error when they declared by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the revelation of God's Word, but even apostles in their ordinary lives could on occasion temporarily lead others astray from the truth (as in the case of Peter at Antioch when he left the table and fellowship of Gentile believers to sit and eat with only Jewish believers who yet maintained certain aspects of the ceremonial law to be necessary). But when faithful ministers realize their error, they humble themselves before the church and repent of their error.

5. A faithful minister is one who professes and practices the true Christian Religion to that degree of biblical purity in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government to which the Lord has brought the Church thus far in history (as evidenced in the faithful Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformed Churches, especially as exemplified in the subordinate standards issued at the Westminster Assembly and approved by the Church of Scotland). This is the faithful exhortation of the Lord in Scripture (Proverbs 22:28; Jeremiah 6:16; Jeremiah 18:15; Philippians 3:16-17; Hebrews 13:7; Revelation 3:25).

D. A faithful minister is one in whom courage is displayed ("and of might").

1. A faithful minister is not moved by the approval of men or the status of men or the

financial gain of men. All temptations are steadfastly resisted by a faithful minister to overlook truths or ignore sins and errors that may be offensive to some, or that may decrease the number of people in the congregation, or may threaten the financial giving of others, or may bring down the wrath of magistrates. Although ministers today may recoil at the idea of being financially bribed to ignore certain truths or errors, nevertheless, I submit that ministers yield to bribes all the time by preaching for the approval of men. When we become more concerned with the size of our congregation than the faithfulness of the preaching, we have accepted a bribe and are guilty of simony (buying the ministry like the curate who is given the largest church as a favor performed for the bishop).

2. Dear ones, we need more ministers like Andrew Melville who would not tolerate flattery in the pulpit or even before the king himself. When King James sought to encroach upon the liberty of the Church within the realm of Scotland, Mr. Melville discharged the following message in person to the king (*Scots Worthies*, pp. 95-96):

This not a time to flatter, but to speak plainly, for our commission is from the living God, to whom the King is subject . . . Sire, we will always humbly reverence your Majesty in public, but having opportunity of being with you Majesty in private, we must discharge our duty, or else be enemies of Christ. And now, Sire, I must tell you, that there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the head of the Commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the Head of the Church, whose subject King James VI is, and of whose kingdom he is not a head, nor a lord, but a member; and they whom Christ hath called, and commanded to watch over His Church, and govern His spiritual kingdom, have sufficient authority and power from Him so to do, which no Christian king nor prince should control or discharge, but assist and support, otherwise they are not faithful subjects to Christ.

In conclusion, the faithful minister is one who unashamedly declares the gospel of salvation to the lost and needy of the world. He preaches without reservation a message of reconciliation. He exhorts, he admonishes, he pleads, he corrects, and he is the ambassador of Christ declaring to all who hear: "Be reconciled to God. His grace is sufficient to save everyone who comes to Christ. No one will be turned away, regardless of the sins he/she has committed. There is healing for you who are sick with sin. There is living water for you who are thirsty. There is living bread for you who are hungry. Take Christ by faith and embrace the promise of Him who cannot lie today as your only hope of eternal salvation. If you do so, I declare to you, as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by the authority of the keys of the kingdom given to me by Christ that you will never perish, but will have everlasting life.

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