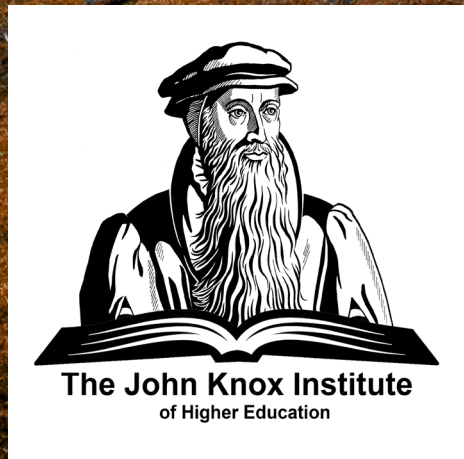


VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

PASTORAL THEOLOGY

by Rev. Harry Woods

LECTURE #1
Introduction and
Practical Exhortations



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Rev Harry Woods recently retired as minister of Kilmorack & Strathglass Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) in Beaully, Scotland, after having served as a minister of the Gospel since 1982. He was the editor of the monthly denominational youth magazine, *The Explorer*; for eleven years and taught Apologetics and Pastoral Theology at the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary in Inverness for eighteen years. He is married to Mairi, and has three adult children and three grandchildren.

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15 Lectures

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2. The Call to the Ministry, part 1
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VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

PASTORAL THEOLOGY

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Lecture #1

Introduction and Practical Exhortations

1. Introduction

Brethren, I would like to welcome you to the course in *Pastoral Theology*. You may come from many different backgrounds and circumstances, but you all are united by a desire to preach the gospel. This introductory lecture is intended to be a helpful education to you as you study for the ministry. In Colossians 3, verses 22 and 23, Paul tells the slaves in Colossae, “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” Remember this as we proceed. As we consider this text, we can think of a theme that is applicable to our exhortation, and it is a calming experience for students preparing for the ministry.

When we think of this preparing for the ministry, this time of preparation for study is often a time of spiritual instability. You will have pressure from the studies themselves. You will have deadlines that you have to meet. You will find that the amount of work that you are called to cover, at times, is almost overwhelming. You’ll also know what it is to be weary and tired as you plod through things that are difficult, perhaps, to understand, or simply wearisome because of the amount of work that you have to do. And on top of all that, you have to contend with the family. If you are a family man, you will know that you have a responsibility to look after your family, your wife, your children. If you are someone who is involved in secular work while you are studying, then you have the problem of having to cope with those problems that you face in work, those things that will arise, schedules that you have to meet, meetings that you have to attend—all these things will bring pressure to bear on your preparation for the ministry. And the very weight of these things can lead to discouragement, to frustration, and to guilt.

You think of discouragement—you may find that you have little success as you are studying a particular topic. You may have to slog hard and long before you grasp a theological concept. Or perhaps, if you are studying the original languages, it may be difficult for you to come to terms with a new language. You may find that you are interrupted more frequently than you anticipated. If you are studying at home, you may have to contend with the noise coming from other rooms, your children coming into the study, and so on. You will also find that you have to deal with disappointments—people that you thought would be helpful turn out not to be helpful. So discouragement is not an uncommon feature in those who are studying for the ministry.

Then you have frustration. You’ll have frustration with the administration of things that seem so unsuited for the study of the ministry, whether it’s filling in your taxes, or keeping your mileage, or having to give account to this committee or that committee. These things can be very frustrating.

People will frustrate you. People will let you down. It may be difficult for you to prepare in those circumstances.

And then, also you will have the problem of guilt, because as you are studying for the ministry, again and again, you're going to discover that you fail to attain the spiritual and academic goals that you were striving for. We all know, if we are Christians, what it is to fail in striving for our spiritual goals. We're not as holy as we ought to be; we are sinful. We find ourselves disobedient and at times unfaithful. And our academic goals, we might have set a deadline for—learning this theology or that subject—only to discover that rather than achieve that goal, we fall short. And on top of all that, the very weight and the burden of study for the ministry can leave our souls shriveled and cold, and we might find ourselves growing distant from the Lord.

Well, what is the outcome of all this? Well, one of the things that you will find, a great danger, you will find that it may cause you—this discouragement, frustration, and guilt—it may cause you to learn bad habits of study. You may be content with superficial study, just glancing over the commentaries; just glancing over the Bible readings, and such like. Your study may be hasty. You might find yourself just doing enough to get by, and satisfy the teachers or the lecturers. It is unlikely, if you fall into these habits, that you will be able to sort this out when you enter the ministry. And the reason for that is that the ministry is harder than study. There are more demands upon your time. Your deadlines are weekly. Whether it be preaching each Lord's Day, or whether it be preaching at the prayer meeting midweek, you will have daily duties that you have to perform. You are, if you're a family man, you cannot just isolate yourself from your wife and children. You will have daily duties of tending the flock, ministering to the flock of God. And so, these are some of the outcomes that will happen or will arise, if you do not address this instability in your time of preparation for the ministry.

Well, here are some suggestions to help you address those problems now, rather than later when it will be harder. And there are three things I want us to think about.

2. Appreciate and Pursue Your Present Calling

The first one is that we have to appreciate and pursue our present calling, or to be more particularly for yourselves, you have to appreciate and pursue your present calling. You believe you have been called to the ministry, and you may be impatient to preach. It is one thing to have the burden of the Lord upon your soul, and one thing to go out and tell others about the good news of Jesus Christ. And so, that impatience may trouble you. You may find present study, that is, the study of theology, or doctrine, or languages, or whatever, you may find that present study a distraction from the Lord's call to the ministry. But you have to remember that you also have a present and subordinate call. You are called to the gospel ministry, that is true, but at the moment, you are called to study for the ministry, and that is what you must give your attention to. Your faith, as a believer, will be shown in your obedience to that present call. You can't expect to grow as a divinity student, if you neglect your studies in that present call. If you're not diligent in pursuing God's present call, what about your call to the ministry? Will that also be carelessly attended to? So, you have been called to the ministry, and this should affect your whole approach to study. You have been called to study for the ministry. Notice what Paul says to the Colossian slaves: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." You are not called to simply study the bare minimum, to satisfy your teachers, to please your teachers, or just to get by. Pursuing your present call will lead you to growth and peace, if you walk in obedience in this present call of studying for the ministry. So that is the first thing—*Appreciate and Pursue Your Present Call*.

3. Being a Student is Not Incompatible with a Call to the Ministry

The second thing is this, that you must appreciate that being a student is not incompatible with a call to the ministry. Notice what Paul says; I've just read, not that slaves are to work heartily as slaves, but rather that whatever they do, they are to do it heartily as to the Lord. We are not to compartmentalize our life, and think that we will give our all to the ministry of the gospel, but we will be giving less in our study for the ministry. We must not think in terms of spiritual study and secular study; spiritual life and secular life. Because these are not unconnected. Whether we are dealing with something that is secular or spiritual, we are to do it heartily as to the Lord. And this is particularly important when we consider the ideas of study and devotion. All our study, whether it is secular or whether it is devotional, is to be devotional. Secular or biblical work, secular or spiritual work is all to be done devotionally, so that we do not turn from our books to the Lord, or from the Lord to our books. In reading and in studying, we do all things as to the Lord. There is no guilt for a divinity student in reading something like philosophy or grammar, when it is done as to the Lord, when it is done as preparation for the work of the ministry.

But you might ask, "What if I find coldness and spiritual indifference while I'm studying for the ministry? What if I find it difficult to maintain a devotional life, if I'm slogging through Greek or Hebrew tenses? What can I do about that?" Well, if study causes coldness, spiritual coldness, then sanctify the study with prayer. Indeed, whether it causes us coldness or not, all our study should be sanctified with prayer. Now what does that mean in practice? Well, we should begin with prayer. We should begin by seeking the Lord's enabling, that he would open our minds and our understanding, that he would teach us and enable us to be retentive in our memories for the things that we put our attention to. So we begin with prayer and ask the Lord to help. And during our study, we should seek the Lord in prayer, when distractions come. When we are tempted to lay off the study and go away and take a break unnecessarily, then seek the Lord for perseverance in that study. When we come across things that we don't understand, then ask the Lord to help us, in order that we might have our minds enlightened to grasp the relevance of what we are reading and studying. Sometimes we might think, "What connection can this possibly have with the work of the ministry?" Ask the Lord to enlighten us in that regard. And then we should end with prayer. We should fix our desire to pray on what we have looked at in our study. We should ask that the Lord would fix in our mind what we have read, and we should thank him for that help.

What if the mind wanders while we are studying? And we are all prone to wondering minds. You get that sudden thought about phoning someone, or praying about someone or for someone, or visiting a person. Now sometimes these just come flying into the mind like birds into a window. But what are we supposed to do with these things? Well, I think, as a general rule, we should resist a divergent train of thought that is sparked off by something we are studying. And the way to help deal with this is to keep a notepad handy, and note down any spiritual or temporal concerns that come to our minds. You might be studying Greek or Hebrew, and you suddenly remember you've got a gas bill to pay. Well, instead of going away and paying the gas bill that instant, just note it down. Perhaps there's someone who is ill in your own congregation, and you feel you ought to visit them or phone them. Well, put a note in your notepad and do that at a convenient time after your study period. Perhaps it is that as you are reading through a text of Scripture, a sermon outline comes to your mind. Well, note it down in the notepad and come back to it later. If you have a desire to pray, an overwhelming desire to pray, then it's probably best to do so. You are, after all, engaged in devotional study.

The third thing that I want us to think about—and remember the first two. We are to remember a time of preparatory study is often a time of spiritual instability, and therefore we are to *Appreciate and Pursue Our Present Calling*. We are to appreciate that *Being a Student is not Incompatible with the Call to the Ministry*.

4. Maintain a Spiritual Balance

And thirdly, we are to remember to seek to *Maintain a Spiritual Balance*. Studies for the ministry are not your only spiritual exercises. Sometimes you find men who are so caught up in their preparation for the ministry that they almost become like reclusives, like hermits, and they forget that they have other obligations. We must remember that we require the benefits of corporate and private worship. We should remember we need exposure to the Word of God, and we need to sit under preaching. Because very soon, if you're studying for the ministry, you won't have the opportunity to sit under a settled ministry. So remember your requirement for worship, corporate and private.

Another thing that we must guard against is listening to other preachers critically. Now this is going to result from your study of homiletics. As you consider how to divide up a sermon, how to frame a sermon, what to say in a sermon, you will start to analyze and look at how other preachers do this. We have to beware of listening to other preachers with a critical spirit. We have to beware of simply finding fault with the way that they're doing things. And to that end, we should try and learn from their good points as well as from their bad. Again, as we sit under other ministers and join in corporate worship, we should apply the sermon to our own soul, rather than analyzing its structure. Again, if you're unable to sit under another minister, then download sermons, and preferably sermons that are not directly connected with the things that you are currently studying. If you're wading through, for example, the Book of Zechariah, and you are trying to understand it, it's probably better, for devotional reasons, to listen to sermons on some other subject altogether.

Again, as we see to maintain that spiritual balance, we have to maintain our fellowship with other Christians. We forsake the assembling of ourselves together at our peril. We must beware of cutting ourselves off from other believers. And so, to that end, we need to get involved in our local congregation, the congregation that we perhaps are connected to. But we must also beware of getting so involved that our studies suffer. And so you see this spiritual balance necessary—be involved, but don't be involved to the extent that your studies suffer. And by being involved with other Christians, by being involved in your local congregation, you will find that it helps you to relate to how the saints think, what they do, how they live. Also, you will see how the unconverted think, and you will be able to relate to them better.

In conclusion, I think we need to appreciate that we are to remember that our studies are never a waste of time when they're done to the Lord. We have been given the greatest of all privileges in being called to the ministry, and we need to keep this in mind, as it will help us face the difficulties of our studies. Faithfulness in our present calling, that is, the study for the ministry, will be rewarded by the Lord who sees our service. Thank you.