

**A Translation of**  
  
**“DAS SCHRIFTSTUDIUM ALS  
DIE BESONDERE AUFGABE DES PASTORS.”**

*August Pieper*

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In the Name of Christ Jesus, our Savior and our Lord!

One of our brothers has asked that the following work be presented to our conference. The request is a worthy one. August Pieper's article was undoubtedly timely when it was first presented, and given increased number of distractions and temptation in our day it is no less timely now.

As to the following translation I ask that the reader take note of the following:

- 1) I have omitted 11 lines of Pieper on p. 9 (p. 202 in the "Quartalschrift") and another 8 lines on p. 12 (pp. 205-206 in the "Quartalschrift) simply because these added nothing to the points that Prof. Pieper was making.
- 2) I tried to strike a balance between a literal translation and correct English usage; any failure on either side is my fault alone., and I ask the reader's indulgence.

With the hope that I have adequately captured Prof. Pieper's thoughts and the prayer that each of us will be encouraged to examine and where necessary to re-order his priorities I commend this article to you for your edification and pastoral consideration.

In no vocation is one less a master after the completion of the years of apprenticeship than in the holy office of the ministry. To be sure not all candidates believe that; but conscientious and humble pastors very soon and every day more clearly come to recognize in practice how much they still lack in knowledge and ability for the proper execution of their office. The theological curriculum has only been able to offer them the most necessary things with respect to doctrine and practical skills. Therefore our candidates will never be sent forth into the ministry without the earnest exhortation that they be diligent in the continuation of their studies, For the faithful pastor the entry into the ministry is not the end of study, but on the contrary only its proper beginning.

To be sure at first the preparation of the sermon will demand so much of the young pastor's available time that he will not be able to undertake a coherent study of other things. With difficulty will the catechesis of Bible history and the catechism be prepared in even a skimpy fashion. The large number of official functions and the relatively considerable trouble which the composition of the sermon gives him will confine him for a long time to the careful working out of his immediate sermon (the pericopes and free texts). But in connection with the composition of the sermon, the young pastor should - as he has the desire and the time for it - get on with a repetition and a deeper study of dogmatics, in order to become free in the presentation of each particular doctrine and every point of doctrine with a precise formulation: When he is only a beginner as a teacher of the Word, the study of dogmatics is the shortest way to the winning of the doctrinal certainty, which is required of the one who appears publicly in the name of God. In the first couple of years the whole area of dogmatics should be repeated and so thoroughly assimilated that he masters the whole body of doctrine and - at least as far as the congregation is concerned - can present from the whole whatever the situation requires.

It is altogether self evident that already in the first years in the ministry he will study many other things besides sermon preparation, catechetics and dogmatics that make him more able for the performance of his office. Just as homiletical theory and the art of catechetics, which give the beginner so many problems, require thorough study if one wants to become apt in their practice, so the daily need of caring for souls will always drive one anew to the study of specific sections of pastoral theology, so that he himself will within himself become clear about how and why he should deal with a situation in exactly this way and not in another. In short, the daily practical demands of the office necessitate above all and of itself thorough theoretical study, if the pastor does not want to change from a novice bungler into a superficial dilettante.

But for the pastor who has acquired a certain proficiency in preaching and catechetics with the passing of time there is a double danger close at hand. One consists in this that he gives up studying in the same measure those things in which he feels he has grown. Instead of writing ever new sermons on the pericopes or working out ever new texts, he makes more and more use of his old homiletical barrel and his whole life never gets out of this same range of thinking. Those are the preachers who already in their middle years or in old age become dull, uninteresting and boring; for they produce absolutely no new thoughts anymore, but on the contrary they always re-thrash the old things in the old phrases. They complain without any justification about the empty pews or the inattentive listeners; for the listener has not yet been born who can listen to the old and familiar with the same interest as the new. The bombast and the artful fire with which a water-carrier preacher cleans up an old sermon is a poor substitute in the absence of new and deeper thoughts which every understanding hearer justifiably seeks, "Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old," Matthew 13:52 .

The second danger is that which comes from much study and much reading. By that two things are meant. First, the study of all sorts of scientific and non-scientific things which have no connection to the office of the ministry. A pastor has more needful and better things to do than to concern himself with a detailed study of mathematics, natural sciences, law, politics, medicine, languages (the biblical languages excepted of course), philosophy or music. To be sure he does have the assignment to keep abreast of affairs in spiritual and practical life in order to feel the pulse of public life so that he is able to take a position as a witness to the truth; but it is a wicked understanding of his call, if he believes that he must especially advance science and art, the development of politics or social life, - in short any particular aspect of modern culture. We have our hands full merely to bring the gospel correctly to mankind.

Even the area of theological-religious study is much too large for the pastor to be able to make a thorough study of the whole or even of the major part of that subject matter. Also here he must content himself with becoming acquainted with and evaluating the main aspects of theology and the chief exponents of the religious life of the present time. That he will keep himself more exactly informed concerning the development of theoretical and practical life within the Lutheran Church is self evident.

We would like to warn the younger pastor about one thing in particular: that is the specialized study which has in view the goal of wanting to become or to accomplish something special in the church. That is ambition; and as it is reprehensible before God, so it also produces nothing but trouble. In the church especially all glory belongs to God and to our Lord Jesus Christ alone, and he does not wish to give it to any other. There are people who gladly introduce something new, and especially when they do not get their way, they produce division and strife, as both ancient and modern church history abundantly prove. "It is required of stewards that one be found faithful," I Cor. 4:2. That should be the one great and sole striving of every pastor. Should he otherwise be an apt individual. God will know how to find him when he needs a man for a particular position. But with ambition for a particular position or accomplishment the faithfulness which is commanded is completely impossible. In itself it is already unfaithfulness; for before all else this belongs to faithfulness, that one wants nothing else than to serve with all his strength in the position which God has assigned to him. Every study which does not lie in this direction is reprehensible.

Under the uncalled for superfluous reading we understand chiefly the all too thorough occupation with the contemporary newspapers and journals which want to serve the propagation of news, entertainment and popular instruction. In order to remain in touch with the important world events or to read an expert judgment about this or that significant contemporary event, the pastor will not be able to do without the newspaper or a journal; but for the former a couple of minutes a day are completely sufficient and for the latter a couple of hours a month are enough. The thorough reading of the daily newspaper can only have a dulling effect and the incessant study of journals only a distracting and spoiling effect which detracts from the diligent study appropriate to the pastoral office. The thorough and habitual occupation with the news and instructional literature we should leave to those whose course of instruction has been completed and whose real life's work is behind them. But who ever is still developing should concentrate on those things which really cultivate the spirit and the heart; these things we should thoroughly acquire for ourselves. For from the many things available the normally gifted will thoroughly acquire only a little. Therefore those things which are most important, which relate to our life's work, and which God has given us should be our chief concern, if they are to mould and edify us and also profit others. *Non multa sed multum!* Concentration also in the study of the pastor is the secret of success, i.e., of theological and pastoral competence.

Now that which the pastor must promote before everything else is the Scriptures themselves. That must still be and remain his one great study after which all else stand in the background. It appears simply superfluous to want still to prove that. Are the Scriptures indeed, which God himself gave the pastor, the source and treasury out of which he should draw all teaching, all wisdom and a strength for his office? It is indeed fundamentally perverse when the pastor reads all sorts of merely human books and the Scriptures themselves he neglects. These all should, as Luther says about his own books, only be a crate for the Holy Scriptures. They are only helping tools in order to correctly understand the Scriptures; they are only of worth in so far as we are not yet well versed in the Scriptures themselves through our own understanding. But we ought not remain standing merely in the forecourt, in the side buildings, in the gate of the temple; on the contrary we must enter the holy place and the most holy place itself. We teachers of the Word must not always make do with second hand teaching. It is a sad anomaly that we are more poorly versed in the Scriptures than in this or that theological work. There should be nothing, absolutely nothing at all that a pastor of ten or fifteen years does not know in the Scriptures.

The Word of God to Joshua applies especially to the pastor as the leader of the people, the shepherd of the flock, the steward of the mysteries of God: "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it, and then you will have success," Joshua 1:8 [Not 1:18, as in the "Quartalschrift".] And all the places in which the laymen

are commanded to study the Scriptures, as in John 5:39, II Timothy 3:15-17, Isaiah 34:16 and others, apply to teachers much more.

Indeed the pastor needs the Word of God much more for his own soul than an average Christian, because he will be much more tempted than they. Doubt about the truth, weariness in the office of the ministry, bad temper, becoming discouraged and afraid, arrogance and a dictatorial manner, becoming a man-pleaser and a hypocrite, laziness, the lust of the flesh, greed, the lust of the world plague the pastor more than the average Christian. When any of these come, then he needs daily strengthening through teaching, comfort, strength, establishment, admonition, warning, so that his light is not extinguished in the darkness, so that he does not preach to others and himself become a castaway.

He is indeed the God-ordained preacher of the Word. But God does not want to preach through him as through a dead megaphone; but on the contrary he should be a witness of the truth of God, that is, a preacher who has himself previously recognized, believed, and experienced what he reveals to others. He should be a scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:52). For not through special illumination or revelation, but through the Scriptures alone does the knowledge of the truth come to us. Thus the one great duty which is imposed on the preacher as such is recorded in places like Galatians 1:6-10; then in the Pastoral Epistles throughout, in II Timothy 2:15 in its context, namely this, that he “rightly distinguish, purely divide the Word of truth;” this duty requires a diligent, faithful study of the Scriptures. He must know how to purely divide the Word from all error, no matter how subtle or innocent that error may appear to be; he must also understand how to select the expression that finds no room for error within it. He must - which is a great art indeed - not confuse one part of the truth with another so that a new doctrine emerges out of it, he ought not to confuse law and gospel, justification and sanctification with one another; he ought not attach conditions to the gospel and gentleness to the law. He should produce a healthy knowledge and a healthy Christianity, Titus 1:13. In order to be able to do that, he himself needs a healthy knowledge of the pure doctrine, of the law and of the gospel, and that cannot be accomplished except through a thorough study of the Scriptures. But the preacher must also reveal to his hearers “the whole counsel of God,” as St. Paul did in Acts 20:27. He should make them rich in all things, in all doctrine and in all knowledge, I Cor. 1:5, that therefore they have no lack of any gift. He has the assignment as shepherd and teacher so to edify the body of Christ, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be carried about by every wind of doctrine,” Eph. 4:13-14. Indeed there is such a wealth of Scripture there, not merely so that he might always present only the central circle of doctrines and facts to his hearers; but on the contrary it is there that he might learn it all in order to be able out of the rich fullness to present the right part at the right time. Indeed he should as a wise and faithful steward give to each soul its due at the proper time, milk to the weak, I Cor. 3:2, solid food to the mature, the rigorous law to the stiff-necked sinner, the comfort of grace to the broken, teaching to the ignorant, humility to the conceited, strength to the weary, and whatever else is necessary to the rest, knowing what to extend to each according to his particular need. And he at all times must have everything at hand in order to be equal to any demand that might present itself from enemies or mockers or who ever else there might be. All of that requires not only a correct but also a rich knowledge of the manifold wisdom of God, which is stored up for us in the Scriptures. There should be in the whole Bible nothing that we pastors would not know.

As far as the method for such a study of the Scriptures is concerned, we need but expand on that great Luther proverb, “*Oratio, meditatio, tentatio faciunt theologum*,” to see if it indeed has any less meaning for us pastors than for theological students. It might be sufficient here to make reference to the place in which Luther enlarges on it: Walch XIV, 123 ff.; Erlangen A. 63, 403 ff. Consult also the Church Postile for the Monday after Easter, St. Louis A. XI, 672 f. [The Walch reference in the “*Quartalschrift*” is incorrect; it should be XIV, 423ff.; both the Walch and the Erlangen references are to Luther’s Preface to the first part of his collected German writings, 1539. I was unable to find this Preface in the American Edition. The Easter Monday sermon is also not in the American Edition.] Here we would like to cover only a couple of things which belong to “*meditatio*.”

To begin with one must be careful that he does not read any part of the Scriptures without special attention, that is, in a superficial or in a completely thoughtless manner. Such a reading makes one necessarily indifferent, blind, stupid and unskilled for penetrating to a deeper knowledge. One must always read with the resolve to lay hold of exactly and completely the sense of a passage or a section in its individual expressions, in its sentences and context. One must not content himself with a chance impression, with a dim impression of that which the text wants. One must not be satisfied before he is certain: this is what the text says. To be sure one will often not accomplish that with the first reading, not even always with the help of commentaries, because he lacks the linguistic and historical knowledge in the first place which make a certain judgment possible. But then consider whether the narrow and the wider context, the preceding and the following solve the difficulty. One should break open his grammar and his lexicon and examine the parallel passages to see if they do not cast a light on the text. And should one not get the sense of the passage in this manner, then he could mark the passage in red or blue or with a cross or some other mark as a still not understood passage; then later he could again have occasion to give it special examination. For the present he could then quietly read further until he got to the next passage of the same sort with which he would repeat the above process. We would like to illustrate what has been said with an example: The epistle to the Romans begins this way:

1. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to preach the gospel of God, 2. which he before has promised through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3. concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4. and mightily proven to be a Son of God according to the Spirit which sanctifies, since the time he rose from the dead, namely Jesus Christ our Lord, 5. through whom we have received grace and the apostolic office, to establish among all heathen the obedience of faith under his name, 6. of which you also are a part, those who are called by Jesus Christ, 7. to all who are at Rome, the most beloved of God and called saints: Grace be with you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"(Romans 1: 1-7) . [A translation of Pieper's translation.]

Who ever reads over this section superficially is in danger of understanding nothing at all; for here there is a single great sentence, in which one thought is piled on another, like a new wave over the preceding; because the insertion of thoughts moves the conclusion so far from the beginning, one easily overlooks its context. The attentive reader, who also wants to understand what he is reading (Acts 8:30), will soon realize that verse 7 is the immediate continuation of verse 1, and that in both verses Paul in his official position as preacher of the gospel to the Christians at Rome is extending his brotherly greeting. Just so, it will soon be clear to him that in verses 2-5, which contain a relative clause, there is a description of the gospel of God which Paul maintains he has been set apart to preach, and indeed a description on the one hand according to its temporal revelation in the world (promised through the prophets in the Old Testament Scriptures), and on the other hand according to its content (the incarnation ... through his resurrection). Then it is also at once apparent that in verse 5 Paul connects again with verse 1 with the name of Jesus Christ the Lord and stresses the fact that he has received his apostolic office for this purpose, to bring the heathen to faith, in addition to which he moreover makes the observation that the Christians in Rome also belong to these heathen.

After the construction on the whole has become clean, it is appropriate to pay attention to the individual parts of the main clause (1 and 7) and then to the subordinate clauses (2-6) and to recognize the relationships of the individual expressions to one another, and finally to make clear what the entire passage intends in this particular context.

There are a considerable number of individual parts to observe, for example, already in verse 1. There Paul describes himself in three ways: 1. he is a servant of Jesus Christ; 2. called to be an apostle; 3. set apart to preach the gospel of God. That is an impressive number of very simile and related attributions. Since one ought to believe that Paul is incapable of any thoughtless or mindless babble, - he is speaking at the time under inspiration - each expression must say something other than another, and that he piles them up this way must have a reason. So it is now the assignment of the studious reader to become clear what each of these expressions means as distinguished from the other, and then he will find that they form an ever more narrow climax. The expression "servant of Jesus Christ" signifies the general servant relationship to Christ, the Prophet, Priest, Evangelist, Teacher, etc., which he has from Christ; "called to be an apostle" narrows the servant relationship

with Christ to the particular office of the apostle, which has other functions than the office of prophet, shepherd, teacher, etc., and which consists in this that as Christ's inspired representative ["Bevollmächtiger"] to the whole unconverted world he is to deliver the message of Christ and should be the head bishop of all who are converted by him or consider themselves Christians in his particular territory. Besides that, in the expression "called" he states the divine source of his apostolate, coming from Christ himself, and thereby he places himself on the same level with the twelve who are properly called, apostles of the Lord. "Set apart to preach the gospel of God" is in its "set apart" a strengthening and a narrowing of the previous "called;" and for the rest there is a concrete designation of the assignment of his apostolate, as an office, namely to see to it that he brings not just any message, but on the contrary exactly this message, the gospel, indeed the gospel of the high, eternal, almighty God.

So now the one who is studying word for word and sentence for sentence has to go further; he has to ask himself with the individual expressions as with the whole sentence or phrase: to what purpose is it expressed exactly this way? to what purpose, for example, does Paul in verse 1 pile up these descriptions of his official position this way, to what purpose is the climax, to what purpose the statement of the content of his office and its description as the gospel of God? To what purpose does he describe the gospel in the following verses according to its Old Testament revelation and according to its chief content, and why exactly in this particular form? What does it mean when in verse 5 he yet again stresses his call and states its assignment in exactly this way? How should we take the remark in verse 6, that also the Christians in Rome belong to the "heathen?" What about this introduction in general? For all these things the one who is studying must seek an answer and try to discover the essential relations that they have to one another. To be sure that will only become completely clear when one has studied through the entire Epistle to the Romans. Therefore one must study through the Epistle completely and in its context and put the individual part or passage into the light of the whole. In this manner of frequent repetition the study of the Scriptures will not leave too much remaining without understanding. Some parts of course will indeed still remain. And there is just such a "crux interpretum" in verse 4....

The point we want to make here is this, that one should study through in this demonstrated manner not just individual passages or sections of the Scriptures, but a whole book, an entire gospel, a whole prophet, a whole epistle in its context. The study of individual disconnected passages, be it ever so thorough, will lead to a mature complete understanding of the Scriptures just as little, for example, as the study of a part of the body, even if it would be the heart, can give a thorough understanding of the whole human body. Indeed a complete understanding of the divine revelation also does not come merely through the study of one or the other of the chief books of the Scriptures, even if it would be the Pentateuch, Isaiah, John, Romans, Galatians or Ephesians; but on the contrary such understanding comes first through the study of all of the books of the Scriptures. The written revelation of God is an organ in which the individual books of the Old and New Testaments form the great members which stand in such a relationship with one another that one can dispense with none of them without creating a gap in the knowledge of the saving counsel of God. And as the Scriptures are in their entirety, so are also the individual books of the same in smaller organs organized within themselves and forming a small entity of knowledge which unlocks itself to one through nothing else than through a contextual study of the whole. As the whole of revelation has one great all-embracing purpose, so each individual book of the Scriptures has its particular purpose, which it wants to reach with us; and only out of this purpose is the whole book and the individual part in the same to be fully understood. On the other hand the point of view of a book cannot be clearly grasped if one does not comprehend the individual part in its organic context with the whole. The concept and the concept's relationships, the sentences and their relationships, the phrases and their relationships, the sections and their relationships, in short the logical precision of the individual concepts and thoughts and the logical context of the same in the small part and in the great - to clearly recognize the thought process, the thought development of a book according to a precise heading - that is the mark of a mature and to a certain extent a complete worthy understanding of the Scriptures, the mark of a theologian.

From what has been said it follows that one must read a book of the Scriptures with fixed attention, which has this special purpose in view. And that in turn leads to the investigation of the historical circumstances

under which the book has been written. I understand completely the Epistle to the Galatians, for example, only when I know who wrote it, to what sort of people he wrote, what particular circumstances in the Galatian congregations caused it, what sort of relationship Paul had with them, out of what place and condition he wrote the letter, when he wrote it, etc. For the individual books of the Bible are for the most part occasioned writings, that is, caused by a particular historical circumstance, growing out of a historical situation; thus I understand fully only in the same measure that I am able to reproduce this historical situation correctly and exactly for myself. The same holds true naturally of the language. A perfect mastery of the language and of the historical situation of Paul would make possible a perfect understanding of his letters. We lack a good deal of both, a knowledge of the historical situations more than the knowledge of the language; therefore our understanding of the Scriptures will always remain a very imperfect one. But that ought not hold us back; indeed it must make us that much more diligent to investigate exactly the little we may know of the historical circumstances of the books of the Scriptures. Thus we will still come to a relatively perfect understanding of the Scriptures. When the pastor has studied the whole Bible, all of the individual books of the same, then it yet remains to say something about the observable order of succession of the books. Plot all books of the Holy Scriptures are of the same importance for all times and conditions of the church. Some books are on the whole of greater significance than others. Thus the beginner will first secure for himself a sure historical foundation for the understanding of the New Testament economy of salvation (“Heilsökonomie”) through the study of the life of Jesus on the basis of the synoptics and the Gospel of John; and as a preparation for the Epistles of Paul a thorough study of the Acts of the apostles is indispensable. Then a thorough understanding of the doctrine of grace in Romans and Galatians should follow. Only after Romans will Ephesians with its teaching concerning the richness of the spiritual blessing in Christ be correctly understood. When one has first gone through these most important of all Scriptures once, then it is advisable to take through the collected letters of Paul in their historical sequence, because in this way the historical circumstance is made easier and the content of the individual letters arranged historically is easier to grasp. Therefore after the Acts of the Apostles, the two Epistles to the Thessalonians, then Galatians, both Epistles to the Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians, I Timothy, Titus, II Timothy, and the remaining books in their order of succession in the German Bible. Of the Old Testament books Genesis, Isaiah, and the Psalms are the most important; in second rank stand Deuteronomy, Joshua, Samuel, the Kings, Micah, Zachariah, and Malachi. II Isaiah ought to receive especially diligent study. For the rest it is also recommended that later the historical order of the succession of books be followed. In 15 years one can in this way study through the chief books of the Scriptures a couple of times and the others at least once, without neglecting the necessary study of the confessional writings, of Luther and this or that dogmatic writing, of church history and many specialized things. Much here of course depends on the external work load of the pastor. The one who serves a large congregation or a number of small ones or who has to continually conduct a school will not attain this goal. But for the rest, desire and love for God’s Word and the effort in everything to become a fit servant of Christ is the main thing. Indeed the more one gives himself to a thorough study of the Bible, the more dull become all human - even theological - books to him, and the more he prefers to return to the Scriptures in which God himself speaks to us and pours out for us and into our bosom the fullness of his wisdom, his comfort and his power.

We would also like to commend this manner of Bible study to the pastoral conferences. One could give someone in the conference, for example, the assignment to work on the Epistle to the Hebrews with regard to its history and its contents. Everything historical, could be subsumed under the question: who is the author of the letter? The content can be easily expounded, because the letter both in whole and its smaller parts is well organized, a logical and symmetrical essay. For such a work to be really fruitful not only the essayist but each member of the conference must work through the Epistle at home, then bring along his work and his Bible; the essayist then should be the lecturer and each point then would be the subject of criticism. That should certainly be a very fruitful activity for a conference. Thus in the course of a few years one could well work through a number of the New Testament writings with great profit for preaching and for the care of souls. But also smaller groups of neighboring pastors or pastors who are friends could undertake this sort of work. In order to encourage just this sort of thing, we want also to publish such Bible studies occasionally in the “quarterly,” and

we are offering in this issue a work on the historical background of the epistle to the Romans. A study on the content should follow in the next issue. At the same time we are asking our brothers in the ministry to honor us with similar works for this publication.

Permit us in conclusion to make yet one purely outward but practical observation. It is self evident that the pastor who is to some extent proficient in the original has the same always at hand in his study; but when the pastor must always work for all practical purposes with the German text, it is recommended that he also attach his own study to the German text and where ever possible always to use the same copy of the Bible. Thus by always and repeatedly looking at the same outward form of the text he gains a localized recognition of the individual passages of the Scriptures, knowing exactly whether a certain passage stands on the top left outside column or the bottom right inside column, etc. That makes not only the finding of a passage easier but also makes easier the retention of the general context. [There follows a brief paragraph on preferred German editions of the Bible and the benefit of having our book store for the purchase of cheap editions with wide margins.]

“Let my going be certain according to your Word and let no unrighteousness rule over me!” Psalm 119:133