

# The Qualities of a Successful Ministry

by Daniel Steele

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*A successful ministry is characterized by the qualities of character, creed, and experience, as exemplified by Barnabas in Acts 11:24.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 23:5, Psalm 51:10, John 16:13, Acts 1:8, Acts 11:24, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:4, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 1 John 2:27

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Christian Ministry"

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## Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the importance of the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the ministry, emphasizing the need for character, creed, and experience. He highlights Barnabas as an example of a successful evangelist, attributing his effectiveness to being a good man, full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost. Steele stresses the essential role of character in the Christian ministry, stating that purity of character is indispensable for success. He also underscores the significance of benevolent affections and transparent generosity in ministry, pointing out that a kind heart is crucial in winning souls to Christ.

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## Transcript

For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord." -- Acts 11:24.

The last clause of the text is so evidently a consequence of the qualities of Barnabas, that there is no need of the usual illative word, therefore. Much people, according to the Greek a vast crowd, were converted from paganism, and gathered unto the Lord Jesus, through the instrumentality of one man. It cannot be amiss, in addressing the patrons, trustees, and faculty of the Boston Theological School, to dwell for an hour upon the personal conditions of success in promoting the salvation of souls. For this is the final cause, the be-all and end-all, of the money here munificently lavished, and the time and toil here consecrated. This is the prayer of the church; this the burden of many a Christian soul bowing in secret; this the purpose of the founders -- Isaac Rich, the munificent; Lee Claflin, the bountiful; and Jacob Sleeper, the princely; and of others who have gone up on high. This the secret of the interest of holy angels, and of Jesus Christ the Lord of all. Not to magnify a sect, but to save men from sin and hell, was this institution established. St. Luke asserts that Barnabas had three personal qualifications for evangelical success. He was a good man, and full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. We infer, therefore, that those characteristics which are essential to the work of the Christian ministry may all be grouped under three heads -- Character; Creed, and Experience. The discussion of these, in the order indicated, well

constitutes the plan of my discourse.

I. There is no profession, no line of effort, in which character is so absolutely essential to success as the Christian ministry. Men will retain a tippling lawyer, if he have power to sway juries, running the risk of finding him tipsy on the court day. The physician, whose skill in the healing art has made him famous, may be profane and licentious, and yet retain his patronage. The rakish artist, if genius moves his brush or chisel, finds a ready and remunerative sale for his masterpieces; while the statesman, or politician rather, -- alas for our times! -- fears the falling off of his majorities, less because of his moral delinquencies, than for his disobedience to the mandates of his party.

Not so with the gospel minister. His purity of character is an indispensable coefficient of his success. This is because Christianity is not a science only, a system of religious truth. It is this, but it is more. It is a life, a divine transforming power. It is effectually preached when its truths are exemplified in the life of the preacher, as well as inculcated by his tongue. He preaches in vain, who cannot point to his own moral rectitude, his own saintly character, as a specimen of the transfiguring power of the gospel.

Even those deluded souls who risk their salvation on the efficacy of the sacraments, through successional ordinations from the apostles, find in a dissolute clergy the strongest trial of their faith -- a trial which multitudes cannot endure, but go away from the altar served by debauched priests, into the arid regions of atheism, where they are relieved from the disgusting sight of a genuflecting hypocrisy. The sinless character of Jesus is the one stubborn fact, the miracle of miracles, which renders his gospel such a power among men.

The existence of such a character in the world's literature is a wonder which neither Strauss nor Renan, Parker nor Emerson, can explain. The absolute rectitude of Jesus is his *pou sto* -- his Archimedean foothold on which with the lever of his truth he can lift the fallen world up to God. When men read the philosophies of Hegel, Kant, or Hamilton, they are not demanding certificates of the moral integrity of these authors before they will accept the truth of their systems. But the character of Jesus Christ cannot be detached from his gospel.

Christianity centers in his person. One act of sin in the author destroys our faith in a scheme whose great purpose is the destruction of the works of the devil. There is a sense in which the same is true of the preacher's relation to the truths which he preaches. Not that the truth of the Christian system depends on any or all its advocates. Christ would be true, though all his apostles had betrayed him. Yet Christ's glory among men would be obscured to the eyes of men, yea, eclipsed, by any such moral defection among his modern evangelists.

The gospel would be powerless to save those who reject its claims, stumbling at the moral obliquities of its advocates. Alas, this is not all hypothetical. Church history has many a dark page demonstrating the truth of our assertion, that a vicious priesthood neutralizes the efficacy of the gospel on their lips. Wherefore, be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord --

"Jesus, let all thy servants shine

Illustrious as the sun,

And bright with borrowed rays divine

Their glorious circuit run."

But goodness is positive as well as negative. It implies the presence of benevolent affections, as well as the absence of moral obliquities. Barnabas was a man of large human sympathies. In the exigencies of the times succeeding the Pentecost, when it was desirable that the whole company of converts should be kept together at Jerusalem for their spiritual instruction, he is especially mentioned for the promptness with which he puts all his worldly goods at the disposal of the church in this extraordinary crisis, evincing thereby a perfect spirit of benevolence and of consecration the farthest removed from all selfish ends in his Christian ministry. This spirit of transparent generosity, self-abnegation, and perfect devotion to the good of the church and to the glory of Christ, was an element of power in his ministry. It is so now. The eagle-eyed world is forever prying into character, and scrutinizing motives, especially in the case of those who profess that --

"The love of Christ doth them constrain

To seek the wandering souls of men."

When there is found one who discards all worldly motives, and sublimely toils through life enduring poverty as "seeing him who is invisible," the world's logic is nonplussed; it has found a practical argument which it can no more answer than it can the original witnesses of the Christian miracles, passing their lives in labors, dangers, and sufferings, voluntarily undergone in attestation of the truth. A kind heart, a large philanthropic soul, whether it comes of nature, or of grace, is so kindred to the spirit of the gospel, that its possessor stands on a high vantage-ground in winning souls to Christ. A hard and unsympathetic nature is a poor medium through which the melting story of the cross is to be poured into the hearts of men. Such a man, though he had the massive intellect of Lord Bacon, would not add many souls to the Lord Jesus. He might be a Titan in polemical theology. But only one such to stand guard over our theological foundations is enough for a generation. The conversion of sinners depends more on the warm atmosphere of love, which attends the presentation of the truth, than on logical power. Few men can follow an abstruse argument, but all can feel. We must not forget that the Lord Jesus came to save men of low degree. These are the majority. They are more skilled in the use of the plough, the hammer, the shuttle, and the oar, than with the syllogism in Barbara. It took the greatness of John Wesley to find this out, and to adapt his preaching to the semi-barbarian peasantry and colliers, and to impress this peculiarity on all his successors to the present time. That peculiar influence which is called the savor of a man, the most uncultivated intuitively perceive and feel. Hence the power of a preacher who carries with him the savor of goodness, evincing itself in his zeal for the suppression of the causes of vice and misery in this life, and thus commending his sincerity in his efforts to lead the people to life everlasting. When will Protestantism out of its' wealth build, endow, and control, as evangelic agencies, hospitals and eleemosynary institutions, as Romanism builds them out of her gathered mites for the aggrandizement of herself? True Christianity is the only genuine philanthropy. The minister of Jesus Christ divests himself of a large element of influence when he lays aside philanthropy in its common acceptation; and he puts a powerful weapon into the hand of his adversary, when, through his neglect, he allows the enemy of the cross of Christ to assume the championship of any humane enterprise.

II. But the minister of Christ must be more than a philanthropist medicating human woes, heading moral reforms, and preventing social demoralization. His is the difficult task of eradicating sin from human souls. Sin is not a cutaneous disease, to be cured by perfumed lotions, to be rose-watered out of the world. It is a stubborn and radical fact, demanding thorough and drastic treatment. The only medicine for its cure is spiritual truth rendered effectual by the Holy Ghost.

Since this truth is not discovered by reason, but is disclosed by revelation, it is apprehended and made real to the soul only by faith. This brings us to the second element of Barnabas' success -- the completeness of his faith, historical and fiducial. Jesus Christ gives a wonderful prominence to the truth as the instrument of human salvation. "For this cause was I born, that I might bear witness to the truth." "The Spirit will guide you into all truth." "Sanctify them through the truth."

"The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God." He who most skillfully and vigorously wields this sword will have the greatest success in revealing the wicked heart to itself. Conviction of sin is nothing more than God's truth held up as a mirror till the sinner sees his own image hideously marred and scarred by sin. The successful preacher is characterized by an acquaintance with the mirror which has such marvelous revealing power. He adjusts it to the dull, purblind eye. He sets it in the strongest light, that it may have its legitimate effect.

There are many in our day who affect to despise doctrines, creed-statements of gospel truth. They endeavor to magnify their own originality, liberality, and independence in theological inquiries by belittling creeds. They perpetually hint that a creed is enslaving and dwarfing to its believers. They assert that some men can do more with a jackknife than others with a whole chest of edged tools. This may be true, without impairing the credibility of the assertion that most builders would prefer the chest of tools.

Rationalism, with its jackknife, may manage to rear a leaky wigwam out of the knotty poles and birch-bark of natural religion; but the true preacher of Christ needs better implements, for he is not building a wretched hut for a day, but an enduring palace, the habitation of God through the Spirit. Free religion begins its downward career by pouring contempt upon a historical faith. Its next step is the denial of a historical Christ. Its last is the apotheosis of human reason.

Whereas it is no more derogatory to reason to accept some truths as primary in theology, than it is in metaphysics; in the one the revelations of the inspiring spirit, and in the other the testimony of the human consciousness. Through all the ages of Christianity the power and spirituality of the church have been in exact proportion to the faithfulness with which the truth has been preached. God's truth is the very soul of persuasion. He who has fed upon it, digested it, and incorporated it into the very texture of his soul by a living faith, has the grand secret of pulpit power.

The word of God is quick, i.e., a living power on earth. It was St. Paul's boast that he had not only "fought the good fight" but that he had "kept the faith," the precious deposit of gospel truth committed to his hand as the sword of his triumph. "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even your faith." Hence, in this sifting and skeptical age, which levels its batteries at revealed truth with that satanic sagacity which assailed the Incarnate Truth himself, we, who know the secret of our strength, will "contend for the faith once delivered to the saints."

But even the truth is not ultimate. It is a means to an end. It is to be conserved for its uses. It has not an absolute, but a relative, value. It is the instrument of our sanctification.

III. Faith worketh experience. This introduces the third qualification, on which we shall amplify more extendedly

1. Barnabas was filled with the Holy Ghost. Here is an experience deep, broad, and full, which gave an irresistible momentum to the activities and utterances of this man of God, and crowned his labors with abundant fruits. Brethren, there is a Holy Ghost. Will you pronounce it fanaticism if your preacher should

say that he has gone beyond the Apostles' Creed, and that he knows the Holy Ghost? The Master justifies this declaration. "But ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." Does not even Philosophy herself teach that faith is to eventuate in knowledge? Have not all the discoveries in the experimental sciences proceeded thus on the maxim of Anselm, Credo ut intelligam, "I believe, in order that I may know"? Does not the faith of the Christian in a future heaven lead him to a future knowledge of that heaven, and shall his faith in the present Holy Spirit not lead into a present knowledge of the Comforter? Faith begets knowledge, and knowledge in turn begets faith in the still higher manifestations of God. Hence the maxim of Abelard is also true, Intelligo ut credam, "I know, in order that I may believe." Thus believing in order to know, and knowing in order to believe, my winged soul mounts up this Jacob's ladder from earth to heaven. How beautifully does St. Paul set forth this ladder of faith and knowledge, combining the maxims of Anselm and Abelard, "I know whom I have believed [here is faith a stepping-stone to knowledge], and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him unto that day" -- here is knowledge a stepping-stone to a new and higher act of faith. Therefore, it ought not to be incredible that the soul, climbing this divine ladder let down from heaven, should at length arrive at a knowledge, not only of the Holy Spirit, but of the fullness of his indwelling as the Answerer and Sanctifier. This is the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, as interpreted by the Wesleyan fathers, and confirmed by their experience and apostolic lives. It was the keynote of Methodism when she sounded her bugles for her march round the world; and throughout her march of a century her columns have faltered when they have failed to hear this peculiar note, and have dashed on in triumph when it has been distinctly heard again.

American Methodism has come near losing the doctrine of the fullness of the Holy Spirit as a blessing distinct from regeneration. The causes are various. The growing popularity of this church, and its advance in social status, have attached to its communion many to whom a deep spirituality is distasteful. An unfortunate spirit of philosophizing on this subject, the unscriptural presentation of it with threatenings, and the many imperfect, and some counterfeit exemplifications of this blessed experience, together with the fear of Palmerism in the East, and of Nazariteism in the West, have, in the language of Charles Wesley --

"Staggered thus the most sincere,

Till from the gospel hope they move;

Holiness as error fear,

And start at perfect love."

Yet despite all these causes, most of which troubled the Wesleys as they do us, we may, with the great poet of Methodism, join in the prayer --

"Lord, thy real work revive,

The counterfeit to end."

Thank God, the eclipse of this doctrine, which once threatened to become total, is rapidly passing away, and this light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is shining forth again, betokening an era of spiritual prosperity and power.

Our Unitarian friends have recently considered and discussed the lessons which Methodism is teaching to Unitarianism. One of those lessons they find to be the entire consecration of the soul to the will of God,

inspiring to a zealous and self-sacrificing life for the salvation of the world. We do not deny that they have found the secret of our success. But when they come to practice this lesson, they will certainly fail unless they begin at the Methodist alphabet -- a living and omnipotent Jesus, and an indwelling personal, divine Comforter, sealing this consecration by his sanctifying power, and making it a divine reality, and not a mere human sentiment. We have not copyrighted this alphabet, for it is not our invention. It is as old as the New Testament, yea, as the Psalms of David -- "Restore thou unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me by thy free Spirit; then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee." If feeble and waning churches wish to become aggressive and prosperous, let them get down on their knees with David, and wrestle with God for the joys of his salvation, and for the mighty guidings of the Holy Ghost. If a hesitating and powerless ministry, weakened by doubts, palsied by fear, would suddenly become bold, mighty, aggressive, and conquering, let them pray to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man. This is like steam to the motionless engine. If a complaining minister, fretting and chafing on hard appointments, would be lifted into a state of perfect and cheerful acquiescence with the divine will where none of his powers will be wasted by friction, but all subsidized for Christ, let him seek the Spirit's anointing with the oil of gladness. For the Holy Spirit in the soul is both impulse and lubrication, both steam and oil to the locomotive.

2. We are taught by many that after justification the progress of the soul is by a steady and gradual development of spiritual power, without crises, sharp transitions, and sudden emergencies from lower to higher states. It is said that this uniform and gradual unfolding of the spiritual life commends itself to reason as the natural and normal method, that only fickle, impulsive, and unstable souls, incapable of this uninterrupted and constant advance, are pushed ahead by the apparently irregular method of special spiritual impulses. It is asserted that even in the case of these, it is commonly, if not always, a sudden restoration from a backslidden state. It is asserted that a truly regenerate soul, remaining victorious over sin, needs no subsequent sudden and sharply defined outpouring unction, and baptism of the Spirit. But when we open the Word of God, we find that, both under the Mosaic and the Christian dispensations, spiritual development has been both by steady growth and spiritual crises. Thus the seventy elders were suddenly baptized with the Spirit when assembled at the tabernacle, and Eldad and Medad in the camp. But the most remarkable instance of a sudden spiritual anointing, notwithstanding an uninterrupted gradual spiritual growth, is that of the great exemplar, Jesus Christ. As he was a perfect man, soul and body, he had a normal physical and intellectual unfolding. We read, also, that his spiritual nature expanded gradually. As a man, he grew in favor with God. Yet before he entered upon his life-mission, he received a special impulse from on high to make him the center whence spiritual power should go forth to bless all with whom he came in contact. That impulse was given to him by the Holy Ghost at his baptism by John, and in the power of the Spirit he returned to Galilee.

We can no more fathom this mystery of the divine Son baptized by the divine Spirit, than we can that of the omnipotent Son praying to the Almighty Father in Gethsemane, and forsaken by him on the cross. Yet we must accept the historical fact of Jesus' baptism by the Holy Ghost as a preparation for his ministry, and that not till then do the evangelists speak of him as "full of the Holy Ghost," "led by the Spirit," and "in the power of the Spirit." He left us an example that we should walk in his steps in everything not peculiar to his person and mission. The blessing of the fullness of the Spirit cannot be peculiar to Christ, because it is promised to all who fully believe. Hence, it is instantaneous, as it was with Jesus at the Jordan, notwithstanding a previous uniform growth in favor with God.

Can any Christian believer, preacher or layman, addressing himself to his lifework, say that because he has a clear evidence of his conversion, he needs no anointing from on high to unify and intensify all the powers of his nature for the service of Christ? Can he assert that because he is not conscious of backsliding, or even of one act of sin, therefore he needs no unction from the Holy One? If you say that this was peculiar to Christ, and in no way an example for every believer, what mean those oft-repeated promises of the Comforter to the apostles who had been declared to be already clean, and to every one who will ask the Father in his name? If you say that this was miraculous and limited to the apostolic age, what does Christ mean when he assures his disciples that the Comforter would abide with them forever? How happens it that the common interrogatory to young converts by the apostles was, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" and that believers were found, in Ephesus a few, and in Samaria a city full, on whom the Holy Ghost had not fallen till they were instructed respecting their privilege by the apostles? St. Paul teaches that "after justification through the death of Christ, much more shall we be saved by his life."

Again, this gift of the divine fullness must be instantaneous, because it is conditioned on a definite act of faith. If a soul, with all its progress, never reaches a time when it distinctly apprehends, by a definite act of faith, "the exceeding greatness of Christ's power to us-ward who believe," it will never obtain this heavenly baptism.

We have not time to show that in all ages of the church the experience of the holiest men and women attests this doctrine of the fullness of the Holy Ghost as a work distinct from regeneration.

If we had time to construct an argument from church history, digging down through its successive strata, after the manner of the geologist, we should find abundant proofs of the distinction between the regenerate state and the experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. But we have only time to direct your attention to the fossil remains of this distinction as seen today in the Roman, the Greek, the Lutheran, and the English Churches in the rite of confirmation, for the purpose of communicating the Holy Spirit by laying hands upon the heads of those who are supposed to have already received the grace of regeneration through water baptism. Having demonstrated the possibility of the experience of the fullness of the Holy Ghost, we proceed to argue the necessity of this deep spiritual experience in the preacher as ground of confidence in the truth, the instrument which he wields for human salvation.

3. The ground of confidence is twofold. First, logical certainties. Christian apologetics addresses the reason. The argument from prophecy, miracles, the morals of the gospel scheme, and the resplendent purity and majesty of Christ, and the propagation of the system, is designed to satisfy the intellect, and to produce the highest certainty attainable by probable, in distinction from demonstrative proof. Hence, we cannot too thoroughly educate our young Christians, especially our candidates for the ministry, in the Christian evidences. They cannot too well know the certainty of those things wherein they have been instructed. They must be led about our spiritual Zion, and tell the towers thereof, and mark well her bulwarks, that they may intelligently defend their faith against the assaults of a rationalistic age, and be able to give a reason for the hope that is in them.

But the highest degree of certitude lies not in the logical faculty. There is still room for doubt. Error may lurk in the premises: a fallacy may exist in the process. The most that Christian apologetics can do is to leave us with an inference. What if the inference be incorrectly concluded? I find myself every day making unwarrantable inferences. Is the advocate of Christian truth in his best estate left a victim to doubt? Romanism says so. Her priests stoutly assert that no man can be absolutely certain of the forgiveness of

his sins, and that the priestly absolution is conditional on the sincerity of the repentance and the completeness of the confession, of which none can be sure; and that nearly all the saints of the canon died in doubt of their acceptance with God. Thus, in her eagerness to monopolize all teaching, Rome denies the illumination of the Holy Ghost. Even after the crowning miracle, the resurrection of their Lord, the disciples were not furnished with all needful certainty respecting the divinity of the gospel. Hence, they were not commanded to go forth after the first interview with the risen Savior, and proclaim to all the world the divine origin of the gospel. That Jesus has power to save to the uttermost is still an inference. Will these men toil, suffer the loss of all -- yes, die, to maintain the correctness of their logic? Will they boldly meet all opposers, and conquer them with syllogisms? Jesus did not put them to this test. There is a higher ground of certainty than the logical faculty. It is the intuitions. On this loftiest summit of possible knowledge, Christ invites all his disciples to stand, "Tarry ye in Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Not many days hence I will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Your inmost souls shall be brought into conscious contact with God.

The soul shall with open vision gaze upon the verities of gospel truth. The Spirit of God, more pervasive than the atmosphere, more subtle than ether, shall seal upon your hearts in characters unmistakable the certainty of my doctrine. Ye shall be assured of the truth on grounds as firm as the self-evident axioms of mathematics, as firm as the intuition of your personal existence. Absolute assurance shall be yours. Doubt shall fly before this demonstration of the divinity of the gospels, and joy shall rush in to fill the soul. Hitherto each disciple might say, in view of his perplexities and harassing doubts --

"like Noah's dove, I flit between

Rough seas and stormy skies."

After the baptism of the Spirit, he can exultingly sing --

"But now the clouds depart,

The winds and waters cease,

And sweetly o'er my gladdened heart

Expands the bow of peace."

The promise was more than fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, and is now fulfilled to every Spirit-baptized soul. Brethren, I know whereof I affirm. I am, by the grace of God, one of a vast number of witnesses who can attest that Jesus Christ as the pardoning Savior, and the Holy Ghost as the indwelling Sanctifier, are realities more veritable to the soul than Emmanuel Kant's two highest sources of sublimity -- the starry heavens above, and the moral law within. This certitude would not be increased by Jesus walking forth in human form before me, healing the sick and raising the dead -- yea, rising from the tomb, and mounting the skies in full view of my unclouded vision. Said Jesus, It is expedient for you, for your assurance, that I, the miracle-worker, should go away. For I will send one who will give you better proofs than miracles. It is expedient for you that I, your personal friend, should depart, for I will send one who will form a closer friendship with you, even inhabiting your bodies, and abiding in your souls, who will make your fellowship with me and my Father more intimate than my human presence. Let the fullness of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, be the experience of the preacher, and he will no longer feebly enunciate gospel truth: he will no longer hesitate to proclaim a living Jesus. Our pulpits will no longer be afflicted with impotency, but be

girded with strength --

"What we have felt and seen,

With confidence we tell;

And publish to the sons of men

The signs infallible."

What are these signs infallible but the testimony of consciousness to marvelous changes wrought within our souls?

When the seventy returned from the trial mission, they came in exultation to Christ, because even the devils were subject to them in his name. He then told them there was a greater and more joyful miracle. "Rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven." It is the office of the Holy Ghost to attest this marvelous fact --

"The Spirit answers to the blood,

And tells me I am born of God."

This assurance is so utterly indubitable, that its possessor becomes bold in the assertion of gospel truth. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." The chain of Christian evidences was complete when the clouds received Jesus from the tearful eyes of his disciples. But this did not make them bold even unto death. "But ye shall receive power from the Holy Ghost." This power is attainable by every Christian. Every preacher has an especial promise, "Lo, I am with you always." Christianity is not waning in spiritual privileges; it is not tapering off to a point as centuries roll by. It is an emanation from an unchanging power, Jesus Christ, yesterday, today, and forever the same. The law of progress, visible in all God's works, would demand an increase rather than a diminution of spiritual power with the lapse of time. The Spirit will abide with you forever. The promise that he will enter and abide as a Comforter is to every one who will ask the Father in the name of the Son. This fullness of the Holy Spirit is not limited, as Mr. Beecher teaches, to a few persons endowed by nature with a peculiar mental and physical organization. Such a limitation would destroy all ground of faith in the promise for any one; for each one would suppose that he was constitutionally debarred from this high experience, and so fail to apprehend it by simple faith in Jesus Christ.

Let me fortify the statement that we may possess an intuitive certainty that Jesus is true, beyond the certainty derived from logical proofs, and even more satisfactory than the testimony of the senses. St. Peter constructs a splendid climax of Christian evidences when he demonstrates that "we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty, when there came such a voice to him from the most excellent glory." Here two senses, sight and hearing, conspire to attest Christ's supernatural person. Then Peter rises a step to a higher proof. "We have a more sure word of prophecy, unto which we do well to take heed." Here fulfilled prophecy cogently argues the truth of Christ. But we have not yet reached the summit of the mountain where the cloudless vertical sun pours down his overwhelming splendors, rendering doubt impossible. The third and crowning proof of the series is an experience, an intuitive conviction of the truth, thus poetically expressed, "unto which ye do well to take heed, until the day-star arise in your hearts." Brethren, has the day-star arisen in your hearts, chasing away your night of doubt

and sadness? Study the scientific proofs of Christianity, as drawn out by the Butlers and Paleys of all the Christian ages, but continue your patient and diligent research till the day-star arises within; otherwise you will be feeble advocates for Jesus, because dimly apprehending the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.

5. Lest any one may suppose that I bring a strange and dangerous doctrine to your ears, let me appeal to the Word of God once more. My assertion is, that the fullness of the Holy Ghost is the sunrise of spiritual illumination and the source of absolute assurance, and that this blessing is attainable by all. St. John, in his first epistle to every Christian, says, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." Not all scientific truth, not all dogmatic truth, but the divine origin of all revealed truth, and the soul's relation to God's law and his love, a conviction clear as noonday that sin is forgiven, and King Jesus is alone enthroned over the soul. Once how dark to my unanointed eye was the following passage: "But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things." "The anointing teacheth" -- a mystery indeed to him on whose head the oil of gladness has not been poured, but a glorious reality to him on whom the joy of this great salvation has been freely bestowed.

6. But the highest efficiency of the preacher requires that his experience be not only possessed, but professed. "The experience of one rational being is of interest to all who become cognizant of it." This is because we are so constituted as to be similarly affected by like causes. Let half a dozen persons far gone with pulmonary consumption publish to the world their complete cure by the same remedy, and the intelligence would flash over the wires, across the continent, irradiating with hope twice ten thousand sick chambers.

Hence the value of testimony. The entire science of medicine has been constructed upon it. The pharmacopoeia has been filled by the attestations of cures. Who can better authenticate the healing than the patient himself? Who better than the renewed and sanctified soul can attest his spiritual transfiguration, and the power by which it was accomplished? Experience avowed is one of the chief elements of the preacher's power to demonstrate the divinity of the gospel and the reality of its blessings to believing souls.

Hence St. Paul, the master logician, when, on critical occasions, his liberty or even his life hanging on the balance of a Roman governor's will, he wanted something more cogent than a syllogism, told the story of his conversion from a persecutor to a preacher of the faith he once destroyed. In fact, his commission, three times renewed, was not to preach, but to testify. When the omnipresent Jesus, as Bishop Simpson graphically expresses it, "Standing on picket duty for the little church at Damascus, took Saul of Tarsus prisoner," he said to him, "For this purpose I have appeared to thee, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in which I will appear unto thee."

When after three days Ananias came to him, he, by divine inspiration, repeated the declaration, "For thou shalt be a witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard." Years afterwards, while slumbering in the castle of Antonia, the Lord stood by him, and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." On each of these occasions testifying is insisted on. Why? Because it is the most cogent and persuasive preaching.

A herald is useful to make proclamation of the law and of the will of the court; but make way -- here comes one more important. He is an unimpeachable witness, who has a testimony to give on the suit before the

judge. All jurists will tell you that one word of authentic evidence is worth more than ten thousand words of sophistical, professional pleading. The witness is far more important than the advocate. The testimony can go to the jury without the argument; but it will not do to send the argument without the testimony.

Yet I fear that this sad blunder the modern Christian church is committing when, through eloquent preachers, she sends to the world the argument without the evidence. It is not often that the witness and the advocate are, in our courts, combined in the same person. But all jurymen know how much more weighty are his words when the advocate is summoned from the bar to the witness-stand, and with uplifted hands attests to the facts. Here is no professional quibbling, no insincere and cunning speech.

Oh, if every Christian pulpit could be for only one Sabbath converted from an advocate's stand to a witness-box, and each Spirit-baptized preacher should say, "Draw near, all ye that fear the Lord, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul," what a stir there would be among the unbelieving world! I verily believe that they would give the verdict of truth to the Man of Calvary, and falling down would acknowledge that God is with us of a very truth. Am I uncharitable when I say that Jesus Christ, on trial before the jury of an unbelieving world, has too many lawyers and too few witnesses?

Am I justified in saying that the advocate who cannot in a moment, at the subpoena of his divine client, turn into a witness, has no business to plead in this court, and that Jesus has retained none such? Should this be the ruling of the court, it is possible that many would be obliged to withdraw from the tribunal. Christ wants a witnessing church. He will have a witnessing ministry. Through all the ages he has honored such with abundant fruits while a mere scholastic ministry is a barren fig-tree, awaiting the Master's withering curse. The fears of our fathers respecting theological schools were not wholly groundless. There is constant danger of depending on mere intellectual force instead of spiritual power.

It is unfortunate that the canons of sacred rhetoric which fetter the modern preacher were the outgrowth of an age of spiritual decline, when unregenerate men sought the priest's office for a piece of bread. Such men, having no experience of the all-vitalizing power and unspeakable blessedness of the Comforter abiding within, endeavored to conceal this glaring defect by declaring it an infraction of good taste to display to public gaze the deep and sacred mysteries of the soul. But the Holy Spirit is a higher authority on points of decorum than Lord Chesterfield. He prompted David to pour forth his personal experiences in song, so that his harp has swayed a thousand-fold more souls than did his scepter. He inspired St. Paul to utter the emotions of his inmost soul in every speech and epistle, down to his swan-song of victory over death. It is a false modesty that robs the preacher of his privilege to witness for the Lord Jesus in the pulpit, and the Philistine Delilah who is shearing him of his locks, and betraying him to his enemies. Others deprecate the testimony for Christ in the pulpit because they fear that the precious waters of salvation, springing up within the soul unto eternal life, are in danger of evaporation by exposure to the sunlight. Not long since, in the portraiture of a recent popular divine, we are informed that he did not allow the deep and sacred experiences of his soul to evaporate in flippant speech. But the experience which Barnabas had -- the fullness of the Holy Ghost -- did not need to be kept dark lest it evaporate; it was in no more danger of such a calamity than the fullness of the Atlantic. God does not keep the ocean in a dark closet to preserve it from evaporation. He pours the sun's full blaze upon it, and lifts it into the sky, and diffuses it over the continents in refreshing showers. And yet the sea does not waste away. The oceanic fullness of the Holy Ghost in the preacher's soul is designed to evaporate in speech, and to come down like rain upon the mown grass. And he whose religion is in danger of evanescing, if he should speak of it often in public, has not righteousness as the waves of the sea, but as the drops of dew.

7. The fullness of the Holy Ghost is necessary to the preservation and efficient use of a great ministerial gift possessed, in an eminent degree, by Barnabas. His name was changed from Josep to the Son of Exhortation, because he was so powerful in exhortation. Exhortation is a higher gift than preaching. The preacher calmly inculcates the truth upon the intellect: the exhorter sways the sensibilities which lie nearer to the will, the executive power of the soul. It is greater to move than to teach. A candle can illumine a rock of flint, but only an anthracite blast furnace can melt it. Gospel preaching can be counterfeited. An unregenerate intellect, well read in theology, and trained in rhetoric, can preach a popular sermon: but exhortation cannot be imitated. The soul must be all aglow with the live coal from off the divine altar. No sham is possible here. This molten stream of persuasion can flow from no galvanic phosphorescence of oratorical action and intense declamation. The pathos of a soul on fire from above, speaking through tears and sobs, prayers and entreaties is an irresistible power which the church cannot afford to lose. This gift is not from the schools. Culture cannot bestow it. The works on homiletics and the professors of sacred rhetoric cannot impart it. God has signally demonstrated this in our day. When he would raise up a great master of the religious sensibilities, he passed by the great colleges, Yale and Harvard, the chief theological seminaries, Andover and Princeton, and fished up out of the sea an illiterate sailor-boy, sent him into Bromfield Lane, where the Holy Ghost set him all aflame with Jesus' love, and gave him a more than kingly scepter with which to sway men for more than half a century. The Holy Ghost made Father Taylor the greatest exhorter of his generation. This is no mean gift, as many suppose. Peter did not preach, but testified, and exhorted on the day of Pentecost. If this gift, which has done so much for Methodism, continues in it, it must be sought for, not in leaders' meetings, nor in Quarterly Conferences, but in the upper chamber in Jerusalem. The refined and the vulgar, the rich and the poor, can be reached and saved by this gift more than by any other. When there are no more sinners to be saved, no more believers to be stimulated to climb the mount of holiness, young men may despise the gift of exhortation. Has not this gift evidently waned away just in proportion as the baptism of power has become rare in the ministry and laity?

We have endeavored to group the qualifications of a successful evangelist under -- Character, Creed, and Experience. Perhaps there is no better place on earth than Boston in which to demonstrate that an experience of the renewing Spirit of God conserves both the creed and the character. Spiritual decline always precedes doctrinal heterodoxy as a necessary antecedent. Decay in the heart is followed by decay in the head. They who will not retain the divine Spirit in their souls cannot retain the divine Christ in their theology.

"No man can truly say

That Jesus is the Lord,

Unless thou take the veil away,

And breathe the living word!

Then, only then, we feel

Our interest in His blood,

And cry with joy unspeakable,

Thou art my Lord, my God!"

If you do not believe St. Paul, perhaps you will believe your own eyes, if you will open them and look around you in eastern Massachusetts. Here you will find churches planted by the Puritans, in which there is now no Lord Jesus, because a hundred years ago, when they closed their doors against the seraphic Whitefield, there was in them no Holy Ghost. Then how painful the evidence that, with the lapse of the doctrine of Christ's divinity, these churches, as if on an inclined plane of ice, are slipping down into Pantheism -- the negation of all foundation for ethical distinctions, and of all safeguards of moral character. I have said nothing of intellectual culture as an element in the successful preacher. My remarks have presupposed a mental development suited to this high office. Barnabas was a Levite, a member of the priestly or quasi-priestly order. The clerisy of the Jews were appointed by God, not only to conserve the sacred oracles and true worship, but to raise the people to a higher intellectual and moral life as natural educators. On the basis of this sacerdotal training, his distinctive Christian qualities were superinduced. Yet I am far from affirming that the time is past when the Spirit may send men from the plough to the pulpit --

"Yes, if the Lord His mind reveal

Even to the meanest of the throng;

Their Father sends by whom He will,

And teaches babes the gospel song.

Not to the prophets' school confined

He gives to the unlearned His word;

And lo, they now declare His mind,

And husbandmen proclaim their Lord!"

We believe in unloosing every tongue, whether male or female, and in giving to every light a candlestick corresponding to its intensity and illuminating power.

Brethren, on the subject of the fullness of the Holy Spirit as a possible and sudden attainment in modern times, I am not here to theorize, to philosophize, to dogmatize, but to testify. Let me turn my pulpit into a witness-stand for one moment. Although this school may teach that testimony in the pulpit should be of an indefinite and impersonal sort, I must speak for myself. Six months ago I made the discovery that I was living in the pre-pentecostal state of religious experience -- admiring Christ's character, obeying his law, and in a degree loving his person, but without the conscious blessing of the Comforter. I settled the question of privilege by a study of St. John's Gospel and St. Paul's Epistles, and earnestly sought for the Comforter. I prayed, consecrated, confessed my state, and believed Christ's word. Very suddenly, after about three weeks' diligent search, the Comforter came with power and great joy to my heart. He took my feet out of the realm of doubt and weakness, and planted them forever on the Rock of assurance and strength. My joy is a river of limpid waters, brimming and daily overflowing the banks, unspeakable and full of glory. God is my everlasting light, and the days of my mourning are ended. I am a freed man. Christ is my Emancipator, bringing me into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. My eyes are anointed so that I can see wonders in God's law. My efficiency in Christ's service is greatly multiplied. In the language of Dr. Payson, I daily exclaim, "Oh, that I had known this twenty years ago!" But I thank God that after a struggle of more than a score of years --

"I have entered the valley of blessing so sweet,  
And Jesus abides with me there;  
And His Spirit and blood make my cleansing complete,  
And His perfect love casteth out fear.  
O come to this valley of blessing so sweet,  
Where Jesus doth fullness bestow;  
And believe, and receive, and confess Him,  
That all His salvation may know."

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/daniel-steele/the-qualities-of-a-successful-ministry/>

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