

# The Man and His Ministry

by J.C. Philpot

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*A minister's ministry should be judged as a whole, considering various periods of life and the character of his hearers.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 27:23, 1 Corinthians 13:11, 1 Timothy 4:15, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:2

**Topics:** "Ministerial Integrity", "Spiritual Maturity"

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## Description

J.C. Philpot emphasizes the importance of evaluating a man of God's ministry as a whole, considering his growth and changes over time, from youth to maturity to old age. Philpot warns against forming premature judgments based on one period of a minister's career, urging listeners to observe the minister's entire journey. He also highlights the significance of a minister's impact on his hearers, noting that the character and depth of the congregation can serve as a testimony to the authenticity and effectiveness of the minister's preaching.

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## Transcript

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To judge of the ministry of a man of God, it is neither sufficient nor fair to take one part or period of his preaching. It must be viewed as a whole. What he was in youth, when full of life, warmth, and zeal; what he was after a longer, deeper experience, when greater maturity of life, and a riper judgment had softened what might have been harsh, without impairing its strength and faithfulness; what he was in declining years, when much family affliction was added to bodily infirmity, and, as a ripened ear of corn, he was being prepared for the heavenly garner. No due estimate can be formed of a minister's grace and gifts, power and life, usefulness and acceptability to the Church of God, by taking him only at one portion of his ministerial career. Take, as an instance, those two eminent servants of God, Mr. Gadsby and Mr. Warburton. We only knew them personally after they had been many years laboring in the vineyard. What Mr. Gadsby was when he first went to Manchester; what Mr. Warburton was when he first settled at Trowbridge, were both quite different from what each was thirty or forty years after--not different in doctrine, not different in experience, not different in any one vital point of the truth of God; but different, as in nature a man of sixty differs from a man of thirty. Bodily powers decline, the mind becomes less active, youthful zeal is, in a good measure, cooled, and all this change exercises an influence on both the man and his ministry.

Would it not be unfair, then, to take a man of God at his first entrance upon the work, and say, "What this man now is, he ever shall be; I form my judgment of him from what he now is, and I do not mean to alter my opinion of him, whatever he may hereafter be, or however he may himself alter? He is a boy now, and a boy he always shall be." But, view the opposite extreme. Take the same man forty or fifty years afterwards. He is now an old man, with many of the weaknesses and infirmities of old age. You hear him now. "He is an old man," you say, "and always was an old man." Now take him at another period--in middle life, when naturally and spiritually he is in his prime, his youthful zeal moderated, his judgment matured, his experience enlarged, but, the infirmities of old age not yet come on. Will you now say, "I have him at last, just as I would have. He never was young; nor ever shall be old; he always was, he always shall be in my mind, just what he is at this present moment?"

But would this be fair any more than before? He might still lack much of what was beautiful in youth, when his bow abode in strength and the fresh dew rested on his tabernacle; he might still lack the softened tone and affection, the gentleness and meekness of old age. Is it not, then, unfair to take any one portion by itself; and must we not, if possible, take the whole of a man's ministry, from first to last, before we are in a position to form a right judgment upon it?

But we have another element from which to form a sound opinion. There is no better testimony of a man's ministry than the character of his hearers. If they are light, frothy, and vain, full of doctrine in the letter, but devoid of savor and power, without a vital experience of the things of God to humble and break them down into humility and contrition, but puffed up with pride, ignorance, and self-conceit, is there not the clearest evidence that such is their minister? "Like people, like priest," is a proverb neither dead nor buried.

But take the converse; let them be a solid, weighty, truly gracious people, many of whom are possessed of a deep experience, others much tried and exercised, and others well established in the truth of God who, as a body, can only permanently cleave to and love a ministry that can feed, instruct, and comfort their souls. Show us this people for a number of years cleaving closely in affection to one minister--it may be idolizing him too deeply, and from the warmth and esteem they feel towards him scarcely allowing there is any one but he who can feed the church of God--but show us such a people, and take him with all his and all their faults and failings; we will show you a savory well-taught man of God over them.

This we view as one of the strongest testimonies, if not the very strongest testimony, of what a man's ministry really and truly is. Gifts may draw a crowd of light and flighty hearers; talent and ability may raise admiration; friendliness and kindness may engender affection; and strict consistency of life may procure esteem; but none of these qualities singly, nor all combined will bring together and keep together for a number of years, a body of gracious, feeling, experimental hearers. To have such, a man must be able to feed the church of God, and must be thoroughly commended to their consciences as the mouth of God to their souls.

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