

The Work of the Ministry

by J.C. Philpot

The ministry requires a special gift that is continually kept up and fed by supplies from God, and without it, the ministry will eventually come to an end and be vulnerable to error.

Scripture: Isaiah 50:11, Matthew 7:15, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Ephesians 4:11, 2 Timothy 4:3

Topics: "Ministerial Gifts", "Spiritual Deception"

Description

J.C. Philpot emphasizes that true ministers are not made by possessing natural abilities, knowledge of scriptures, or even gracious experiences, but by a special ministerial gift continually supplied by God. He warns of the dangers of ministers relying solely on their own gifts and falling into error when seeking novelty and change to combat declining congregations. Philpot highlights how errors can intoxicate the mind, leading to a false sense of revival and spiritual enlightenment, ultimately causing churches and congregations to drift into heresy and spiritual shipwreck.

Transcript

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"None but he who made the world," said John Newton, "can make a Christian;" and none but he, say we, who makes a Christian can make a minister. It is not possessing what is called a gift in prayer, or even having some light on the word, and some power of expressing ideas with force and clearness; or being endued with zeal and earnestness, and a desire for the glory of God and the good of souls, that constitute we will not say a call to, but even a fitness for, the ministerial office. A man may have good natural abilities, a competent knowledge of the scriptures, a clear, sound, doctrinal creed, and some good measure of gracious experience, and a gift with his pen or tongue to set forth what he has known and felt, and yet not be fit for the work of the ministry.

In order to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood, there must be a special ministerial gift, and that continually kept up and fed by supplies from the only Fountain of light and life. Everything else wears out, and sooner or later comes to an end. Good men, whom God never made nor intended to make ministers, may have spiritual gifts, as the apostle speaks, 1 Cor. 12:4, and as possessed of such may be very useful and acceptable as private Christians, as members of churches, in reading, and prayer, and conversation, in holding office as deacons, or even in a small way as occasional 'supplies' in

little country places, or in visiting the sick, and by speaking a word in season to the tried and tempted. These gifts and graces of the Blessed Spirit they may in some measure possess, and yet not have that continued supply of heavenly wisdom and utterance, or that power, authority, and unction which are required for the work of the ministry, so as to be made a real and permanent blessing to the church of God.

For the Lord's sent servants have to go on, as well as begin, to plough from morning to night, and acre after acre, and that from year to year, as well as put the plow-share into the first furrow. How then can they go on in a work so important and so peculiar unless continually enriched from above with fresh accessions or renewed supplies of spiritual knowledge, holy wisdom, heavenly instruction, divine life and power in their own souls, and above all with the special blessing of God resting on their word and their testimony? Without this new, fresh, and continued supply from above, renewing their youth like the eagle's, and reviving their soul as well as their ministry, sooner or later all they once seemed to possess comes to an end. Gifts wear out; zeal declines; the old expressions, from constant repetition, lose the charm of novelty, and are found irksome; the often-told anecdote becomes stale and wearisome; the past experience has been related until none care to hear it; the congregation drops off in number; the church declines; and all without and within become as stagnant as the green-mantled pool.

But what can the poor man do? He has given up his trade or business; has a large and increasing family; other churches and congregations care little to have or hear him, for a minister unacceptable at home is not usually acceptable abroad. Yet he must go on hammering away at the old irons, going through the same round of prayer and preaching, until he and all around him sink into a state where all life and power seem lost and gone.

Now we know that this is a true picture, though not a very favorable or flattering one, of many churches and congregations; but this, in some instances, is not the worst feature of the case; for this is a state of things which especially paves the way for the introduction of error.

Thus far, then, we have assumed the case of a good man, but one not called to the ministry. But now view another case--that of a gifted man without humbling grace, and see with us how this wearing away of gifts places him in a perilous position, as regards the floating errors of the day. The decline of the church and congregation being generally and tangibly felt in more ways than one, for thinning pews mean a diminishing salary, it becomes plainly seen that in order to stand at all some change is needful, something new and fresh to stir and rouse the minister and people from their present state of declension.

This needed novelty, this longed-for change is found at once in one or more of the various errors of the day. There is something in these errors peculiarly fascinating to the natural mind. It suits the reasoning faculties, especially if a man be naturally fond of argument and contention, intoxicates the mind with pride, makes it drunk with the spirit of delusion, and, as we have often thought, acts on the mental faculties.

Now, when a minister of good natural abilities has drunk down an error, say, the denial of the eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord, or the doctrine of non-backsliding, or that of non-chastisement for sin, or that of the pre-existence of the human soul of the Lord Jesus Christ, his whole mind becomes infected with the poison, and, like intoxicating drink, it seems to put new life and spirit into him. It gives him quite a new field to walk in, rouses his mind to unwonted energy, imparts a freshness to his views and a new train of thought and expression, all which pass off for a blessed revival from the Lord, and these intoxicating feelings, which are merely a spirit of delusion, or the influence of Satan on the mind as an angel of light,

are unhesitatingly set down as the work of the Blessed Spirit upon the heart. There is such a thing as the light of error, what the scripture calls "the sparks of our own kindling," as well as the light of truth; and as the children of light see light in God's light, and read truth in the light of truth, so the children of darkness read truth in the light of error. It appears to their deluded minds as if a perfectly new light were cast upon the scriptures. This is "walking in the light of their fire, and in the sparks that they have kindled;" (Isa. 50:11;) and as this fire gives warmth as well as light, they warm themselves at it, and say, "Aha! I am warm; I have seen the fire."

The error, as thus preached with zeal and energy, and, as it appears, with new and unusual life and liberty, begins to spread. Some of his leading men, perhaps his rich, influential deacons, have either long secretly held or now drink down the error from his lips, and become drunk with the same spirit of delusion. From all this working together arises a temporary flush of prosperity; a new connection is entered into with ministers of the same views; there is an exchange of pulpits; gifted but erroneous men get admission; and in a short time, with the exception of a few of the real children of God, who from their poverty have no weight or influence, the whole church and congregation are drawn into the whirlpool of error, and concerning faith often make utter shipwreck.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/the-work-of-the-ministry/>

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