

# William Gadsby

by J.C. Philpot

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*J.C. Philpot's sermon pays tribute to William Gadsby, highlighting his profound impact on ministry through sound doctrine, humility, and a deep understanding of grace.*

**Scripture:** 2 Samuel 3:38, Proverbs 27:2, Romans 5:20, Ephesians 4:32, Titus 2:7

**Topics:** "Christian Leadership", "Humility In Ministry"

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## Description

J.C. Philpot pays a heartfelt tribute to William Gadsby, acknowledging him as one of the greatest ministers raised up by God since the days of Huntington. He describes Gadsby's natural intellect as clear, penetrating, and quick-witted, perfectly suited for his role as a leader in the spiritual army. Philpot highlights Gadsby's sound, clear, and scriptural ministry, emphasizing his unwavering commitment to proclaiming the truth without seeking personal glory. Gadsby's humility, consistency in character, and genuine kindness towards others are commended, reflecting a life dedicated to glorifying God and serving His people.

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## Transcript

WILLIAM GADSBY

A Tribute of High Esteem and Love.

By J. C. Philpot, 1844

When the Lord called to Himself the soul of our dear friend, William Gadsby, with truth it might be said, "There is a great man fallen this day in Israel" (2 Sam. 3:38). We believe we are but speaking in full unison with the feelings and sentiments of the living family of God in this country when we say that, taking him all in all, we have lost in Mr. Gadsby the greatest minister that God has raised up since the days of Huntington.

Our remarks we may conveniently throw under two heads--what he was viewed NATURALLY--and what he was viewed spiritually.

His natural intellect seems to us to have been singularly clear, sound, penetrating, and sagacious. We have in our day met with men of more capacious mind, greater reasoning powers, and more varied and versatile talents--but with few or none so quick-sighted and ready-witted. He seemed at once intuitively to penetrate through the folds of delusion and error, and with a glance of his eye to look into the very heart of

everything that he turned his attention to. We venture to say that few people ever spoke to Mr. Gadsby without his knowing pretty well the end of the sentence before they had got halfway through it, or before his quick and humorous eye had not already deciphered the character of the speaker. His quick, ready witted replies, embodying so much in a few words, will be long remembered by those who heard them from the pulpit or in the parlour.

Though not possessed of much education (an advantage, by the way, much overrated), he was a man of much reflection, and may be said in this way to have educated his own mind far better than school or college could have done for him. His mind was of that class which rises according to the emergency. Some minds sink and fail when unusual circumstances and pressing difficulties arise. ... But there are other minds (and Mr. Gadsby's was one of that class) which rise with, and are called out by difficulties and emergencies, and shine most conspicuously when weaker minds give way.

The Lord had appointed Mr. Gadsby to be a leader, and to stand for half a century in the front rank of His spiritual army. He therefore bestowed upon him a mind not to be daunted with difficulties and dangers, but to rise with and to be ready for every new emergency. He was to occupy a post also in keen-witted and energetic Manchester--where, perhaps, of all places in the kingdom, strength, decision, and soundness of mind are most required; and to labor much in the North, where brains or the lack of them are quickly perceived by its sagacious inhabitants. The Lord therefore gave him a mind eminently adapted for his post. Classics and mathematics, grammar and history, and all the lumber of academic learning were not needed; but an acute, sagacious, clear, and sound understanding was required for such a commanding post, as Mr. Gadsby was to occupy. We only knew him when his mental faculties were guided by grace, and made to glorify God; but, viewed in that light, we consider that his mental endowments were admirably fitted for his post.

Benevolence and sympathy with suffering, in every shape and form, we believe to have been natural to Mr. Gadsby; and though it may be hard to define to what extent and in what direction grace enlarged and guided his natural disposition, we do not doubt that, even had he lived and died in a state of nature, the character of humanity, kindness and affection, would have been stamped upon his memory.

But we pass on to view him SPIRITUALLY, and here we freely confess our inability to do him justice. We shall briefly mention first what strikes us as the prominent features of his ministry, and then what we have observed in him as connected with his Christian profession.

Thorough soundness in every point seems to have been peculiarly stamped upon his ministry. Whether he handled doctrine, experience, or precept--his speech and his preaching were sound, clear and scriptural. We know no preacher who was so equally great in these three leading branches of the Christian ministry. Some may have excelled him in clearness and fullness of doctrinal statement; others may have entered more deeply and fully into a Christian's diversified experience; and others may have more powerfully enforced the precepts of the gospel. But we never heard anyone who was so uniformly great in all--and so clearly, ably and scripturally gave to each their place, and yet blended their distinct colors into one harmonious gospel tint. In doctrine he was not dry, in experience he was not visionary, and in precept he was not legal--but, in a way peculiarly his own, he so worked them up together that they were distinct and yet united, relieving each other without confusion, and like the three strands of a rope, strengthening each other without cumbrous knot or loose tangle.

In handling DOCTRINE he showed "integrity" (Titus 2:7), and was singularly free from fanciful interpretations, strained and mystical views upon dark texts, and that false spiritualization which passes with many for wondrous depth, but which he valued at its due worth. In reading his published sermons we have been much struck with the soundness, clearness, simplicity and sobriety of his interpretations. He saw too clearly that his doctrine was the doctrine of the Scriptures to wrest any part of the Word from its connection, or to rest a truth upon a text which did not clearly declare it, when there were so many passages in which the Holy Spirit had plainly revealed it.

His object was not that William Gadsby should be admired for his ingenuity, learning, depth of eloquence--but that the God of all grace should be glorified. He did not dare to make the pulpit a stage for 'creature display', still less a platform from which he might keep up a perpetual excitement by some new view of a passage, some startling paradox, some dazzling array of figures and illustrations--the whole sermon being to illustrate this text--"Who so great a man as I?"

In doctrine his favorite topic was the union of the Church with her covenant Head, and all the spiritual blessings that spring out of that union. Nor did he ever keep back the grand truths which are usually denominated Calvinistic, but which should rather be called 'Bible truths'.

Election, in particular, was a point he much dwelt upon, and it usually occupied a prominent place in all his discourses. No man was less afraid of the doctrine frightening and alarming people, or being a stumbling-block in the way of the enquirer. He had no idea of smuggling people into religion, and insinuating Calvinism so gently that they were made Calvinists almost before they knew it. He knew that the doctrine was of God--and, as the servant of God, he proclaimed it on the walls of Zion.

The doctrine of the Trinity too was a darling topic with him. He well knew that it was the grand foundation stone of revealed truth, and that out of a Triune God flowed all the mercies and blessings that are bestowed upon the Church of Christ.

In a word, he held "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." No novelty in doctrine allured him from the old path. For nearly fifty years he stood upon the battlements of Zion, holding forth the word of life; and from the beginning to the end of his ministry maintained, with undeviating consistency, the same glorious truths, and sealed them at last with his dying breath.

"Among innumerable false, unmoved,

Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,

His loyalty he kept, his love and zeal;

Nor number, nor example, with him wrought,

To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,

Though single."

In handling EXPERIENCE, into which he seemed more particularly led during the latter years of his life, he neither set up a very high--nor a very low standard. But he always insisted strongly upon such an experimental knowledge of the spirituality of God's law as should completely throw down and cut to pieces all creature righteousness, and always contended for such an experimental knowledge of Christ as should

bring pardon and peace. No man ever, we believe, expressed himself more strongly upon the deep corruption of the heart, its deceitfulness, horrible filthiness, and thorough helplessness.

One point we have often admired in his ministry; he would touch upon such spots as no other minister that we know ever dared approach. And this he did in a way peculiar to himself. He did not give glowing descriptions of human depravity; but sometimes in a way of warning, and sometimes with self-abhorrence, and sometimes as a word of encouragement to poor backsliders--he would touch upon sins which would make pious professors lift up their eyes with mock horror. But he hit the right nail on the head, as many of God's children know to their soul's joy. Of sin he never spoke but with the greatest abhorrence; but he was not one of those who are all holiness in the pulpit, and all filthiness out of it.

Another point which we have thought he handled in a way peculiarly his own, and with great sweetness and power, was, to use his favorite expression, "the riches of matchless grace." Were we to mention a text which seems to sum up his preaching, it would be Romans 5:20-21, "Moreover the law entered that sin might abound"--(these were his views upon the law) "but where sin abounded" (what a field for opening up, as he would sometimes do, the abounding of inward sin and filth!) "grace did much more abound"--here he was at home in tracing out the glories of sovereign, distinguishing grace. The glory of God's grace, from its first rise in the eternal covenant, to its full consummation in future blessedness, was indeed his darling theme. When speaking of the heights of super-angelic glory to which the blessed Redeemer had raised the Church, he was sometimes carried, as it were, beyond himself. A grandeur and dignity clothed his ideas, and he spoke with such power and authority, that it seemed almost as if he had been in the third heaven, and was come back to tell us what he had seen and heard there!

Great originality, all must admit, was stamped upon his ministry. His ideas and expressions were borrowed from none. His figures and comparisons were singularly original and pertinent, and generally conveyed his meaning in a striking manner. Few men's reported sermons bear reading so well as his--that great test whether there is any sterling stuff in them. Very simple, and yet very clear, very full of matter, and that of the choicest kind, with the text thoroughly worked out, and that in the most experimental manner.

A friend of ours and his well characterized, we think, in one sentence Mr. Gadsby's ministry. "It contains," said he, "the cream of all the preachers I ever heard." We think this is an appropriate expression. His sermons were not 'skimmed milk'--but were rich in unction savor, and power--and possessed a fullness and depth such as we find in no other reported sermons that we have seen.

But our limits remind us that we must not dwell too long upon his ministry, and therefore we proceed to drop a few hints on his CHRISTIAN CHARACTER, more especially as it came under our personal observation.

1. One feature we have often admired in Mr. Gadsby's character--his singular HUMILITY. Who ever heard him angle for praise? Who ever heard him boasting of, or even alluding to--his popularity as a preacher--his large congregation--his gifts for the ministry--his acceptance with the people of God--his numerous invitations to preach at different places, and the blessing that generally rested upon his pulpit labors? Who ever perceived him, in the most indirect manner, fishing to learn who had heard him well, and dabbling in that wretched love of flattery--which, disgusting in all, is doubly so in the ministers of the gospel?

We have seen him, after some of the grandest sermons we have ever heard in our lives, sitting with no self-approving smile upon his countenance--no mock-bashful looks, as if waiting to receive the incense of flattery--no self-enthroned dignity of state as king of the pulpit and lord of the vestry--but like a little child, simple and humble, the chief of sinners, and less than the least of all saints. Great as he was as a minister, and deservedly esteemed and loved, there was nothing in him of 'the great master'. No man was ever more free from priestly dignity or fleshly holiness. It was not with him, "I am the great man to be listened to by my knot of admirers--what I say is law--and all you have to do is to approve." Such parlour priest-craft the honest soul of William Gadsby abhorred!

2. His conduct out of the pulpit, as far as our observation goes, was singularly consistent with all his profession in it. We do not speak here of mere outward consistency. What but a lying tongue, ever found a visible blemish in his fifty years ministry? But in the little courtesies of life, who ever entertained a more courteous visitor than he? Who of the numerous friends who at different places received him into their houses ever saw in him an overbearing, fretful, covetous, selfish, proud disposition? Kindness and friendship, and courtesy to all, sometimes even to a fault, shone forth in him.

3. And who ever heard him slander and backbite, or peddle gossip from house to house? Admitted as he was into the bosom of so many families, who ever knew him to talk of what he must have seen and witnessed in so many places? Naturally disposed to humour, what a fund there would have been for his quick and ready-witted tongue! But who ever heard him make any allusion, except to the kindness of his entertainers, or who ever knew him carry tales from one end of England to the other?

4. How singularly free, too, was our departed friend from running down and depreciating brother ministers! We never once heard him drop an unkind allusion or say a disparaging word against a minister of truth. His hand never carried a secret dagger to stab his brethren with. On the contrary, we have thought him too open hearted and long-armed, and too ready to receive as men of God ministers whose only recommendation was a sound Calvinistic creed. If he erred, it was that he thought and spoke too well of some professing godliness--from whom the mask has since dropped. But of this a minister might be sure, that if Mr. Gadsby received him as a brother, he treated him as such behind his back as well as before his face. He never sought to exalt himself by depreciating them, and was the last to say a word to their discredit, or which, if repeated, would wound their minds.

5. And to this we may add, that, as he was the last to depreciate, so was he the last to flatter. His kindness and brotherly love kept him from the one, and his sincerity preserved him from the other. He neither said crude things to wound--nor smooth things to please. He did not tyrannize with violent temper--nor fawn with canting servility. He neither took liberties nor allowed them; he knew his place and kept it; and while, by a calm, courteous demeanor, he preserved the respect due to him as a Christian man and minister, he was frank, free, and obliging. In fact, he rather erred, now and then, as we have hinted, on the side of courtesy. He was desirous of making himself agreeable, and sometimes this led him to repeat the thrice-told tale, and tell the well-known anecdote, sometimes humourous, but usually profitable in its intention, and almost always to depreciate himself.

But we feel we must stop. Our limits do not allow us to dwell upon his extensive labors in the ministry, his frequent and long journeyings to preach the gospel--his self-denying and temperate habits of life--his prudence in domestic and monetary matters--his kindness and liberality to the poor--the noble manliness of his character--and his entire freedom from cant, hypocrisy, and whine. We highly esteemed and loved him, and revere his memory with growing affection. We consider it a privilege to have known him, and

would not be in the ranks of those who despised or slandered him for a thousand worlds.

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