

Daniel Rowlands - Part 2

by J.C. Ryle

J.C. Ryle's sermon on Daniel Rowlands highlights the extraordinary power, Christ-centered focus, and impactful delivery of the great Welsh preacher's ministry.

Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16, John 3:16, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Ephesians 4:11-12, Philippians 1:27, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:2, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 2:9

Topics: "The Power of Preaching", "Christ-Centered Ministry"

Description

J.C. Ryle reflects on the powerful ministry of Daniel Rowlands, emphasizing the extraordinary impact of his preaching, which was characterized by a constant focus on Christ, rich theological content, and vivid language. Despite the challenges of translating his sermons, Ryle highlights Rowlands' ability to connect with his audience through simple yet profound messages that appealed to both the unconverted and believers. His fervent delivery and deep emotional engagement drew large crowds and sparked spiritual awakenings, demonstrating the effectiveness of a ministry centered on Christ. Ryle concludes that Rowlands' legacy is a testament to the lasting influence of preaching that honors Jesus and addresses the needs of the congregation.

Transcript

IN taking a general survey of the ministry of Daniel Rowlands of Liangeitho, the principal thing that strikes one is the extraordinary power of his preaching. There was evidently something very uncommon about his sermons. On this point we have the clear and distinct testimony of a great cloud of witnesses. In a day when God raised up several preachers of very great power, Rowlands was considered by competent judges to be equalled by only one man, and to be excelled by none. Whitefield was thought to equal him; but even Whitefield was not thought to surpass him. This is undoubtedly high praise. Some account of the good man's sermons will probably prove interesting to most of my readers. What were their peculiar characteristics? What were they like?

I must begin by frankly confessing that the subject is surrounded by difficulties. The materials out of which we have to form our judgment are exceedingly small. Eight sermons, translated out of Welsh into English in the year 1774, are the only literary record which exists of the great Welsh apostle's fifty years' ministry. Besides these sermons, and a few fragments of occasional addresses, we have hardly any means of testing the singularly high estimate, which his contemporaries formed of his preaching powers. When I add to this, that the eight sermons extant appear to be poorly translated, the reader will have some idea of

the difficulties I have to contend with.

Let me remark, however, once for all that when the generation, which heard a great preacher, has passed away, it is often hard to find out the secret of his popularity. No well-read person can be ignorant that Luther and Knox in the sixteenth century, Stephen Marshall in the Commonwealth times, and George Whitefield in the eighteenth century, were the most popular and famous preachers of their respective eras. Yet no one, perhaps, can read their sermons, as we now possess them, without a secret feeling that they do not answer to their reputation. In short, it is useless to deny that there is some hidden secret about pulpit power, which baffles all attempts at definition. The man, who attempts to depreciate the preaching of Rowlands on the ground that the only remains of him now extant seem poor, will find that he occupies an untenable position. He might as well attempt to depreciate the great champions of the German and Scottish Reformations.

After all, we must remember that no man has a right to pass unfavourable criticisms on the remains of great popular preachers, unless he has first thoroughly considered what kind of thing a popular sermon must of necessity be. The vast majority of sermon-hearers do not want fine words, close reasoning, deep philosophy, metaphysical abstractions, nice distinctions, elaborate composition, profound learning. They delight in plain language, simple ideas, forcible illustrations, direct appeals to heart and conscience, short sentences, fervent, loving earnestness of manner. He who possesses such qualifications will seldom preach to empty benches. He who possesses them in a high degree will always be a popular preacher. Tried by this standard, the popularity of Luther and Knox is easily explained. Rowlands appears to have been a man of this stamp. An intelligent judge of popular preaching can hardly fail to see in his remains, through all the many disadvantages under which we read them, some of the secrets of his marvellous success.

Having cleared my way by these preliminary remarks, I will proceed at once to show my readers some of the leading characteristics of the great Welsh evangelist's preaching. I give them as the result of a close analysis of his literary remains. Weak and poor as they undoubtedly look in the garb of a translation, I venture to think that the following points stand out clearly in Rowlands' sermons, and give us a tolerable idea of what his preaching generally was.

The first thing that I notice in the remains of Rowlands is the constant presence of Christ in all his addresses. The Lord Jesus stands out prominently in almost every page. That his doctrine was always eminently "evangelical" is a point on which I need not waste words. The men about whom I am writing were all men of that stamp. But of all the spiritual champions of last century, none appear to me to have brought Christ forward more prominently than Rowlands. The blood, the sacrifice, the righteousness, the kindness, the patience, the saving grace, the example, the greatness of the Lord Jesus, are subjects which appear to run through every sermon, and to crop out at every turn. It seems as if the preacher could never say enough about his Master, and was never weary of commending him to his hearers. His divinity and his humanity, his office and his character, his death and his life, are pressed on our attention in every possible connection. Yet it all seems to come in naturally, and without effort, as if it were the regular outflowing of the preacher's mind, and the language of a heart speaking from its abundance. Here, I suspect, was precisely one of the great secrets of Rowlands' power. A ministry full of the Lord Jesus is exactly the sort of ministry that I should expect God to bless. Christ-honouring sermons are just the sermons that the Holy Spirit seals with success.

The second thing that I notice in the remains of Rowlands is a singular richness of thought and matter. Tradition records that he was a diligent student all his life, and spent a great deal of time in the preparation of his sermons. I can quite believe this. Even in the miserable relics, which we possess, I fancy I detect strong internal evidence that he was deeply read in Puritan divinity. I suspect that he was very familiar with the writings of such men as Gurnall, Watson, Brooks, Clarkson, and their contemporaries, and was constantly storing his mind with fresh thoughts from their pages. Those who imagine that the great Welsh preacher was nothing but an empty declaimer of trite commonplaces, bald platitudes, and hackneyed phrases, with a lively manner and a loud voice, are utterly and entirely mistaken. They will find, even in the tattered rags of his translated sermons, abundant proof that Rowlands was a man who read much and thought much, and gave his hearers plenty to carry away. Even in the thin little volume of eight sermons, which I have, I find frequent quotations from Chrysostom, Augustine, Ambrose, Bernard, and Theophylact. I find frequent reference to things recorded by Greek and Latin classical writers. I mark such names as Homer, Socrates, Plato, Æschines, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Carneades. Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Nero, the Augean stable, Thersites, and Xantippe, make their appearance here and there. That Rowlands was indebted to his friends the Puritans for most of these materials; I make no question at all. But wherever he may have got his learning, there is no doubt that he possessed it, and knew how to make use of it in his sermons. In this respect I think he excelled all his contemporaries. Not one of them shows so much reading in his sermons as the curate of Llangeitho. Here again, I venture to suggest, was one great secret of Rowlands' success. The man who takes much pains with his sermons, and never brings out what has "cost him nothing," is just the man I expect God will bless. We want well beaten oil for the service of the sanctuary.

The third thing that I notice in the remains of Rowlands is the curious felicity of the language in which he expressed his ideas. Of course this is a point on which I must speak diffidently, knowing literally nothing of the Welsh tongue, and entirely dependent on translation. But it is impossible to mistake certain peculiarities in style, which stand forth prominently in everything, which comes from the great Welsh apostle's mind. He abounds in short, terse, pithy, epigrammatic, proverbial sentences, of that kind which arrests the attention and sticks in the memory of hearers. He has a singularly happy mode of quoting Scriptures in confirming and enforcing the statement he makes. Above all, he is rich in images and illustrations, drawn from everything almost in the world, but always put in such a way that the simplest mind can understand them. Much of the peculiar interest of his preaching, I suspect, may be traced to this talent of putting things in the most vivid and pictorial way. He made his hearers feel that they actually saw the things of which he was speaking. No intelligent reader of the Bible, I suppose, needs to be reminded that in all this Rowlands walked in the footsteps of his divine Master. The sermons of Him who "spake as never man spake," were not elaborate rhetorical arguments. Parables founded on subjects familiar to the humblest intellect, terse, broad, sententious statements, were the staple of our Lord Jesus Christ's preaching. Much of the marvellous success of Rowlands, perhaps, may be traced up to his wise imitation of the best of patterns, the great Head of the Church.

The fourth and last thing, which I notice in the remains of Rowlands, is the large measure of practical and experimental teaching which enters into all his sermons. Anxious as he undoubtedly was to convert sinners and arouse the careless, he never seems to forget the importance of guiding the Church of God and building up believers. Warnings, counsels, encouragements, consolations suited to professing Christians, are continually appearing in all his discourses. The peculiar character of his ministerial position may partly account for this. He was always preaching in the same place, and to many of the same hearers, on Sundays. He was not nearly so much an itinerant as many of his contemporaries. He could

not, like Whitefield, and Wesley, and Berridge, preach the same sermon over and over again, and yet feel that probably none of his hearers had heard it before. Set for the defence of the gospel at Llangeitho every Sunday, and seeing every week the same faces looking up to him, he probably found it absolutely necessary to "bring forth new things as well as old," and to be often exhorting many of his hearers not to stand still in first principles, but to "go on unto perfection." But be the cause what it may, there is abundant evidence in the sermons of Rowlands that he never forgot the believers among his people, and generally contrived to say a good many things for their special benefit. Here again, I venture to think, we have one more clue to his extraordinary usefulness. He "rightly divided the word of truth," and gave to every man his portion. Most preachers of the gospel, I suspect, fail greatly in this matter. They either neglect the unconverted or the true Christians in their congregations. They either spend their strength in perpetually teaching elementary truths, or else they dwell exclusively on the privileges and duties of God's children. From this one-sided style of preaching Rowlands seems to have been singularly free. Even in the midst of the plainest addresses to the ungodly, he never loses the opportunity of making a general appeal to the godly. In a word, his ministry of God's truth was thoroughly well balanced and well-proportioned; and this is just the ministry which we may expect the Holy Ghost will bless.

The manner and delivery of this great man, when he was in the act of preaching, require some special notice. Every sensible Christian knows well that voice and delivery have a great deal to say to the effectiveness of a speaker, and above all of one who speaks in the pulpit. A sermon faultless both in doctrine and composition will often sound dull and tiresome, when tamely read by a clergyman with a heavy monotonous manner. A sermon of little intrinsic merit, and containing perhaps not half-a-dozen ideas, will often pass muster as brilliant and eloquent, when delivered by a lively speaker with a good voice. For want of good delivery some men make gold look like copper, while others, by the sheer force of a good delivery, make a few halfpence pass for gold. Truths divine seem really "mended" by the tongue of some, while they are marred and damaged by others. There is deep wisdom and knowledge of human nature in the answer given by an ancient to one who asked what were the first qualifications of an orator. "The first qualification," he said, "is action; and the second is action; and the third is action." The meaning of course was, that it was almost impossible to overrate the importance of manner and delivery.

The voice of Rowlands, according to tradition, was remarkably powerful. We may easily believe this, when we recollect that he used frequently to preach to thousands in the open air, and to make himself heard by all without difficulty. But we must not suppose that power was the only attribute of his vocal organ, and that he was nothing better than one who screamed, shouted, and bawled louder than other ministers. There is universal testimony from all good judges who heard him, that his voice was singularly moving, affecting, and tender, and possessed a strange power of drawing forth the sympathies of his hearers. In this respect he seems to have resembled Baxter and Whitefield. Like Whitefield, too, his feelings never interfered with the exercise of his voice; and even when his affections moved him to tears in preaching, he was able to continue speaking with uninterrupted clearness. It is a striking feature of the moving character of his voice that a remarkable revival of religion began at Llangeitho while Rowlands was reading the Litany of the Church of England. The singularly touching and melting manner in which he repeated the words, "By thine agony and moody sweat, good Lord, deliver us," so much affected the whole congregation, that almost all began to weep loudly, and an awakening of spiritual life commenced which extended throughout the neighbourhood.

Of the manner, demeanour, and action of Rowlands in the delivery of his sermons, mention is made by all who write of him. All describe them as being something so striking and remarkable, that no one could have

an idea of them but an eyewitness. He seems to have combined in a most extraordinary degree solemnity and liveliness, dignity and familiarity, depth and fervour. His singular plainness and directness made even the poorest feel at home when he preached; and yet he never degenerated into levity or buffoonery. His images and similes brought things home to his hearers with such graphic power that they could not help sometimes smiling. But he never made his Master's business ridiculous by pulpit joking. If he did say things that made people smile occasionally, he far more often said things that made them weep.

The following sketch by the famous Welsh preacher, Christmas Evans, will probably give as good an idea as we can now obtain of Rowlands in the pulpit. It deserves the more attention, because it is the sketch of a Welshman, an eye-witness, a keen observer, a genuine admirer of his hero, and one who was himself in after-days a very extraordinary man

"Rowlands' mode of preaching was peculiar to himself - inimitable. Methinks I see him now entering in his black gown through a little door from the outside to the pulpit, and making his appearance suddenly before the immense congregation. His countenance was in every sense adorned with majesty, and it bespoke the man of strong sense, eloquence, and authority. His forehead was high and prominent; his eye was quick, sharp, and penetrating; he had an aquiline or Roman nose, proportionable comely lips, projecting chin, and a sonorous, commanding, and well-toned voice.

"When he made his appearance in the pulpit, he frequently gave out, with a clear and audible voice, Psalm XXVII. 4 to be sung. Only one verse was sung before sermon, in those days notable for divine influences; but the whole congregation joined in singing it with great fervour. Then Rowlands would stand up, and read his text distinctly in the hearing of all. The whole congregation were all ears and most attentive, as if they were on the point of hearing some evangelic and heavenly oracle, and the eyes of all the people were at the same time most intensely fixed upon him. He had at the beginning of his discourse some stirring, striking idea, like a small box of ointment which he opened before the great one of his sermon, and it filled all the house with its heavenly perfume, as the odour of Mary's alabaster box of ointment at Bethany; and the congregation being delightfully enlivened with the sweet odour, were prepared to look for more of it from one box after the other throughout the sermon.

"I will borrow another similitude in order to give some idea of his most energetic eloquence. It shall be taken from the trade of a blacksmith. The smith first puts the iron into the fire, and then blows the bellows softly, making some inquiries respecting the work to be done, while his eye all the time is fixed steadily on the process of heating the iron in the fire. But as soon as he perceives it to be in a proper and pliable state, he carries it to the anvil, and brings the weighty hammer and sledge down on the metal, and in the midst of stunning noise and fiery sparks emitted from the glaring metal, he fashions and moulds it at his will.

"Thus Rowlands, having glanced at his notes as a matter of form, would go on with his discourse in a calm and deliberate manner, speaking with a free and audible voice; but he would gradually become warmed with his subject, and at length his voice became so elevated and authoritative, that it resounded through the whole chapel. The effect on the people was wonderful; you could see nothing but smiles and tears running down the face of all. The first flame of heavenly devotion under the first division having subsided, he would again look on his scrap of notes, and begin the second time to melt and make the minds of the people supple, until he formed them again into the same heavenly temper. And thus he would do six or seven times in the same sermon.

"Rowlands' voice, countenance, and appearance used to change exceedingly in the pulpit, and he seemed to be greatly excited; but there was nothing low or disagreeable in him--all was becoming, dignified, and excellent. There was such a vehement, invincible flame in his ministry, as effectually drove away the careless, worldly, dead spirit; and the people so awakened drew nigh, as it were, to the bright cloud--to Christ, to Moses, and Elias--eternity and its amazing realities rushing into their minds.

"There was very little, if any, inference or application at the end of Rowlands' sermon, for he had been applying and enforcing the glorious truths of the gospel throughout the whole of his discourse. He would conclude with a very few striking and forcible remarks, which were most overwhelming and invincible; and then he would make a very sweet, short prayer, and utter the benediction. Then he would make haste out of the pulpit through the little door. His exit was as sudden as his entrance. Rowlands was a star of the greatest magnitude that appeared the last century in the Principality; and perhaps there has not been his like in Wales since the days of the apostles."

It seems almost needless to add other testimony to this graphic sketch, though it might easily be added. The late Mr. Jones of Creaton, who was no mean judge, and heard the greatest preachers in England and Wales, used to declare that "he never heard but one Rowlands." The very first time he heard him, he was so struck with his manner of delivery, as well as his sermon, that it led him to a serious train of thought, which ultimately ended in his conversion. Charles of Bala, himself a very eminent minister, said that there was a peculiar "dignity and grandeur" in Rowlands' ministry, "as well as profound thoughts, strength and melodiousness of voice, and clearness and animation in exhibiting the deep things of God." A Birmingham minister, who came accidentally to a place in Wales where Rowlands was preaching to an immense congregation in the open air, says: "I never witnessed such a scene before. The striking appearance of the preacher, and his zeal, animation, and fervour were beyond description. Rowlands' countenance was most expressive; it glowed almost like an angel's."

After saying so much about the gifts and power of this great preacher, it is perhaps hardly fair to offer any specimens of his sermons. To say nothing of the fact that we only possess them in the form of translations, it must never be forgotten that true pulpit eloquence can rarely be expressed on paper. Wise men know well that sermons, which are excellent to listen to, are just the sermons which do not "read" well. However, as I have hitherto generally given my readers some illustrations of the style of my last century heroes, they will perhaps be disappointed if I do not give them a few passages from Rowlands'.

My first specimen shall be taken from his sermon on the words, "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. VIII. 28).

"Observe what he says. Make thou no exception, when he makes none. All! Remember he excepts nothing. Be thou confirmed in thy faith; give glory to God, and resolve, with Job, 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' The Almighty may seem for a season to be your enemy, in order that he may become your eternal friend. Oh! Believers, after all your tribulation and anguish, you must conclude with David, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.' Under all your disquietudes you must exclaim, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!' His glory is seen when he works by means; it is more seen when he works without means; it is seen, above all when he works contrary to means. It was a great work to open the eyes of the blind; it was a greater still to do it by applying clay and spittle, things more likely, some think, to take away sight than to restore. He sent a horror of great darkness on Abraham; when he was preparing to give him the best light. He touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, and lamed him, when he

was going to bless him. He smote Paul with blindness, when he was intending to open the eyes of his mind. He refused the request of the woman of Canaan for a while, but afterwards she obtained her desire. See, therefore, that all the paths of the Lord are mercy, and that all things work together for good to them that love him.

"Even affliction is very useful and profitable to the godly. The prodigal son had no thought of returning to his father's house till he had been humbled by adversity. Hagar was haughty under Abraham's roof, and despised her mistress; but in the wilderness she was meek and lowly. Jonah sleeps on board ship, but in the whales belly he watches and prays. Manasseh lived as a libertine at Jerusalem, and committed the most enormous crimes; but when he was bound in chains in the prison at Babylon his heart was turned to seek the Lord his God. Bodily pain and disease have been instrumental in rousing many to seek Christ, when those who were in high health have given themselves no concern about him. The ground, which is not rent and torn with the plough, bears nothing but thistles and thorns. The vines will run wild, in process of time, if they be not pruned and trimmed. So would our wild hearts be overrun with filthy, poisonous weeds, if the true Vinedresser did not often check their growth by crosses and sanctified troubles. 'It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.' Our Saviour says, 'Every branch that beareth fruit, my Father purgeth, that it may bring forth more fruit.' There can be no gold. or silver finely wrought without being first purified with fire, and no elegant houses built with stones till the hammers have squared and smoothed them. So we can neither become vessels of honour in the house of our Father till we are melted in the furnace of affliction, nor lively stones in the walls of new Jerusalem till the hand of the Lord has beaten off our proud excrescences and tumours with his own hammers.

"He does not say that all things will but do, work together for good. The work is on the wheel, and every movement of the wheel is for your benefit. Not only the angels who encamp around you, or the saints who continually pray for you, but even your enemies, the old dragon and his angels, are engaged in this matter. It is true; this is not their design. No They think they are carrying on their own work of destroying you, as it is said of the Assyrian whom the Lord sent to punish a hypocritical nation, 'Howbeit, he meaneth not so;' yet it was God's work that he was carrying on, though he did not intend to do so. All the events that take place in the world carry on the same work--the glory of the Father and the salvation of his children. Every illness and infirmity that may seize you, every loss you may meet with, every reproach you may endure, every shame that may colour your faces, every sorrow in your hearts, every agony and pain in your flesh, every aching in your bones, are for your good. Every change in your condition - your fine weather and your rough weather, your sunny weather and your cloudy weather, your ebbing and your flowing, your liberty and your imprisonment, all turn out for good. Oh, Christians, see what a harvest of blessings ripens from this text! The Lord is at work; all creation is at work; men and angels, friends and foes, all are busy, working together for good. Oh, dear Lord Jesus, what hast thou seen in us that thou shouldst order things so wondrously for us, and make all things--all things to work together for our good?"

My second specimen shall be taken from his sermon on Rev. III. 20

"Oh, how barren and unfruitful is the soul of man, until the word descends like rain upon it, and it is watered with the dew of heaven! But when a few drops have entered and made it supple, what a rich harvest of graces do they produce! Is the heart so full of malice that the most suppliant knee can expect no pardon? Is it as hard to be pacified and calmed as the roaring sea when agitated by a furious tempest? Is it a covetous heart; so covetous that no scene of distress can soften it into sympathy, and no object of wretchedness extort a penny from its gripe? Is it a wanton and adulterous heart, which may as soon be satisfied as the sea can be filled with gold? Be it so. But when the word shall 'drop on it as the rain, and

distil as the dew,' behold, in an instant the flint is turned into flesh, the tumultuous sea is hushed into a calm, and the mountains of Gilboa are clothed with herbs and flowers, where before not a green blade was to be seen! See the mighty change! It converts Zaccheus, the hard-hearted publican and rapacious tax-gatherer, into a restorer of what he had unjustly gotten, and a merciful reliever of the needy. It tames the furious persecuting Saul, and makes him gentle as a lamb. It clothes Ahab with sackcloth and ashes. It reduces Felix to such anguish of mind that he trembles like an aspen leaf. It disposes Peter to leave his nets, and makes him to catch thousands of souls at one draught in the net of the gospel. Behold, the world is converted to the faith, not by the magicians of Egypt, but by the outcasts of Judea!"

The last specimen that I will give is from his sermon on Heb. I. 9:

"Christ took our nature upon him that he might sympathize with us. Almost every creature is tender toward its own kind, however ferocious to others. The bear will not be deprived of her whelps without resistance: she will tear the spoiler to pieces if she can. But how great must be the jealousy of the Lord Jesus for his people! He will not lose any of them. He has taken them as members of himself, and as such watches over them with fondest care. How much will a man do for one of his members before he suffers it to be cut off? Think not, O man, that thou wouldst do more for thy members than the Son of God. To think so would be blasphemy, for the pre-eminence in all things belongs to him. Yea, he is acquainted with all thy temptations, because he was in all things tempted as thou art. Art thou tempted to deny God? So was he. Art thou tempted to kill thyself? So was he. Art thou tempted by the vanities of the world? So was he. Art thou tempted to idolatry? So was he; yea, even to worship the devil. He was tempted from the manger to the cross. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The Head in heaven is sympathizing with the feet that are pinched and pressed on earth, and says, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?'"

I should find no difficulty in adding to these extracts, if the space at my command did not forbid me. Feeble and unsatisfactory, as they undoubtedly are, in the form of a translation, they will perhaps give my readers some idea of what Rowlands was in the pulpit, so far as concerns the working of his mind. Of his manner and delivery, of course, they cannot give the least idea. It would be easy to fill pages with short, epigrammatic, proverbial sayings culled from his sermons, of which there is a rich abundance in many passages. But enough, perhaps, has been brought forward to give a general impression of the preaching that did such wonders at Llangeitho. Those who want to know more of it should try to get hold of the little volume of translated sermons from which my extracts have been made. Faintly and inadequately as it represents the great Welsh preacher, it is still a volume worth having, and one that ought to be better known than it is. Scores of books are reprinted in the present day, which are not half so valuable as Rowlands' eight sermons.

The inner life and private character of the great Welsh preacher would form a deeply interesting subject, no doubt, if we knew more about them. But the utter absence of all materials except a few scattered anecdotes leaves us very much in the dark. Unless the memoirs of great men are written by relatives, neighbours, or contemporaries, it stands to reason that we shall know little of anything but their public conduct and doings. This applies eminently to Daniel Rowlands. He had no Boswell near him to chronicle the details of his long and laborious life, and to present him to us as he appeared at home. The consequence is, that a vast quantity of interesting matter, which the Church of Christ would like to know, lies buried with him in his grave.

One thing, at any rate, is very certain. His private life was as holy, blameless, and consistent, as the life of a Christian can be. Some fifteen years ago, the Quarterly Review contained an article insinuating that he

was addicted to drunkenness, which called forth an indignant and complete refutation from many competent witnesses in South Wales, and specially from the neighbourhood of Llangeitho. - That such charges should be made against good men need never surprise us. Slander and lying are the devil's favourite weapons, when he wants to injure the mightiest assailants of his kingdom. Satan is pre-eminently "a liar." Bunyan, Whitefield, and Wesley had to drink of the same bitter cup as Rowlands. But that the charge against Rowlands was a mere groundless, malicious falsehood, was abundantly proved by Mr. Griffith, the vicar of Aberdare, in a reply to the article of the Quarterly Review, printed at Cardiff. We need not be reminded, if we read our Bibles, who it was of whom the wicked Jews said, "Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners" (Matt. XI. 19). If the children of this world cannot prevent the gospel being preached, they try to blacken the character of the preacher. What saith the Scripture? "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matt X. 24, 25).

The only light that we can throw on the character and private habits of Rowlands is derived from the few anecdotes which still survive about him. I shall, therefore, conclude my account of him by presenting them to my readers without note or comment.

One leading feature in Rowlands' character was his humility. Like every eminent servant of God of whom much is known, he had a deep and abiding sense of his own sinfulness, weakness, and corruption, and his constant need of God's grace. On seeing a vast concourse of people coming to hear him, he would frequently exclaim: "Oh, may the Lord have mercy on me, and help me, a poor worm, sinful dust and ashes." When a backslider was pointed out to him, who had once been one of his followers, he said: "It is to be feared indeed that he is one of my disciples; for had he been one of my Lord's disciples, he would not have been in such a state of sin and rebellion." He often used to say, during his latter days, that there were four lessons which he had laboured to learn throughout the whole course of his religious life, and yet that he was but a dull scholar even in his old age. These lessons were the following.. (1.) To repent without despairing; (2.) To believe without being presumptuous; (3.) To rejoice without falling into levity (4.) To be angry without sinning. He used also often to say, that a self-righteous legal spirit in man was like his shirt, a garment which he puts on first, and puts off last.

A habit of praying much was another leading characteristic of Rowlands. It is said that he used often to go to the top of Aeron Hills, and there pour out his heart before God in the most tender and earnest manner for the salvation of the numerous inhabitants of the country which lay around him. "He lived," says Morgan, "in the spirit of prayer, and hence his extraordinary success. On one occasion having engaged to preach at a certain church, which stood on an eminence, he had to cross a valley in sight of the people, who were waiting for him in the churchyard. They saw him descend into the bottom of the valley, but then lost sight of him for some time. At last, as he did not come up by the time they expected, and service-time had arrived, some of them went down the hill in search of him. They discovered him, at length, on his knees in a retired spot a little out of the road. He got up when he saw them, and went with them, expressing sorrow for the delay; but he added, 'I had a delightful opportunity below.' The sermon which followed was most extraordinary in power and effect."

Diligence was another distinguishing feature in the character of Rowlands. He was continually improving his mind, by reading, meditation, and study. He used to be up and reading as early as four o'clock in the morning; and he took immense pains in the preparation of his sermons. Morgan says, "Every part of God's Word, at length, became quite familiar to him. He could tell chapter and verse of any text or passage of

Scripture that was mentioned to him. Indeed the word of God dwelt richly in him. He had, moreover, a most retentive memory, and when preaching, could repeat the texts referred to, off-hand, most easily and appropriately."

Self-denial was another leading feature of Rowlands' character. He was all his life a very poor man; but he was always a contented one, and lived in the simplest way. Twice he refused the offer of good livings--one in North Wales, and the other in South Wales--and preferred to remain a dependent curate with his flock at Llangeitho. The offer in one case came from the excellent John Thornton. When he heard that Rowlands had refused it, and ascertained his reasons, he wrote to his son, saying, "I had a high opinion of your father before, but now I have a still higher opinion of him, though he declines my offer. The reasons he assigns are highly creditable to him. It is not a usual thing with me to allow other people to go to my pocket; but tell your father that he is fully welcome to do so whenever he pleases." The residence of the great Welsh evangelist throughout life was nothing but a small cottage possessing no great accommodation. His journeys, when he went about preaching, were made on horseback, until at last a small carriage was left him as a legacy in his old age. He was content, when journeying in his Master's service, with very poor fare and very indifferent lodgings, he says himself, "We used to travel over hills and mountains, on our little nags, without anything to eat but the bread and cheese we carried in our pockets, and without anything to drink but water from the springs. If we had a little buttermilk in some cottages we thought it a great thing. But now men must have tea, and some, too, must have brandy!" Never did man seem so thoroughly to realize the primitive and apostolic rule of life. Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."

Courage was another prominent feature in Rowlands' character. He was often fiercely persecuted when he went about preaching, and even his life was sometimes in danger. Once, when he was preaching at Aberystwith, a man swore in a dreadful manner that he would shoot him immediately. He aimed his gun, and pulled the trigger, but it would not go off--On another occasion his enemies actually placed gunpowder under the place where he was about to stand when preaching, and laid a train to a distant point, so that at a given time they might apply a match, and blow up the preacher and congregation. However, before the time arrived, a good man providentially discovered the whole plot, and brought it to nothing. --On other occasions riotous mobs were assembled, stones were thrown, drums beaten, and every effort made to prevent the sermon being heard. None of these things ever seems to have deterred Rowlands for a moment. As long as he had strength to work he went on with his Master's business, unmoved by opposition and persecution. Like Colonel Gardiner, he "feared God, and beside him he feared nothing." He had given himself to the work of preaching the gospel, and from this work he allowed neither clergy nor laity, bishops nor gentry, rich nor poor, to keep him back.

Fervent and deep feeling was the last characteristic, which I mark in Rowlands. He never did anything by halves. Whether preaching or praying, whether in church or in the open air, he seems to have done all he did with heart and soul, and mind and strength. "He possessed as much animal spirits," says one witness, "as were sufficient for half a dozen men." This energy seems to have had an inspiring effect about it, and to have swept everything before it like a fire. One who went to hear him every month from Carnarvonshire, gives a striking account of his singular fervour when Rowlands was preaching on John III. 16. He says, "He dwelt with such overwhelming, extraordinary thoughts on the love of God, and the vastness of his gift to man, that I was swallowed up in amazement. I did not know that my feet were on the ground; yea, I had no idea where I was, whether on earth or in heaven. But presently he cried out with a most powerful voice, 'Praised be God for keeping the Jews in ignorance respecting the greatness of the Person in their hands!'

Had they known who he was, they would never have presumed to touch him, much less to drive nails through his blessed hands and feet, and to put a crown of thorns on his holy head. For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. I will wind up this account of Rowlands by mentioning a little incident which the famous Rowland Hill often spoke of in his latter days. He was attending a meeting of Methodist ministers in Wales in one of his visits, when a man, nearly a hundred years old, got up from a corner of the room and addressed the meeting in the following words

"Brethren, let me tell you this: I have heard Daniel Rowlands preach, and I heard him once say, Except your consciences be cleansed by the blood of Christ, you must all perish in the eternal fires." Rowlands, at that time, had been dead more than a quarter of a century. Yet, even at that interval, "though dead he spoke." It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all remembrance, that the ministry, which exalts Christ, crucified most, is the ministry, which produces most lasting effects. Never, perhaps, did any preacher exalt Christ more than Rowlands did, and never did preacher leave behind him such deep and abiding marks in the isolated corner of the world where he laboured a hundred years ago.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/daniel-rowlands-part-2/>

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