

# William Edwy Vine

by John Bjorlie

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*The sermon explores the life and contributions of William Edwy Vine, emphasizing his practical approach to Christianity and significant literary works.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 25:9, Isaiah 49:21, Luke 17:10, 1 Corinthians 3:13, 1 Corinthians 4:2, Ephesians 6:7

**Topics:** "Faith And Obedience", "Christian Discipleship"

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## Description

John Bjorlie preaches about the life and legacy of William Edwy Vine, the author of the Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. Vine, unlike many detached scholars, was a practical Christian who valued family, physical health, and spiritual habits. Through his personal experiences and spiritual discernment, Vine exemplified a life guided by faith and obedience to God's leading, especially in his missionary work and literary contributions.

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## Transcript

What kind of man would write an "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words"? Would he spend his existence cloistered away in an ivory tower, surrounded by heaps of books, and seldom, if ever, descend to the streets below? Perhaps we imagine that there is a hidden community of such people, and they are the ones who give us those cumbersome bookends called lexicons, concordances, encyclopedias and dictionaries.

No doubt there are many authors who appear so detached. They approach the Word of God in a purely academic and theoretical manner. Indeed, it is rare to find Christian scholars who have not fallen into the snare of stale, sterile intellectualism. But William Edwy Vine (1873-1949) was not one of them. To him, becoming a theoretical Christian, and not a practical one, was a dreaded fate.

### Upbringing and Family Life

Through the teaching of his godly father and mother, he was converted in early boyhood, and at the age of fourteen, he was baptized and received into fellowship with the assembly meeting in Fore Street, Exeter, England.

W. E. Vine's father had a boarding school called Mount Radford School, in a suburb of Exeter. At the age of seventeen William became a teacher in his father's school, at the same time pursuing an education at University College of Wales at Aberystwyth, and later at London University. Those years were part of a

golden era in English scholarship that have never been surpassed. Academic giants roamed the land, strict mental disciplines were enforced, and keen minds stretched.

In 1899, he married Miss Phoebe Baxendale, who kept pace with this versatile worker for fifty years. In the mercy of God, they lived to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary about three months before he passed away. They raised five children.

Vine had a schoolmaster's air about him. But at home his children saw a man of wit and whimsy who delighted to burrow ingenious tunnels for his children's sand castles, or to construct a tower of building blocks that reached to the ceiling of the nursery. His children testified that he could be stern at times, but never harsh. Vine left his evenings for his family and would often play the piano and sing children's songs in his mellow, tenor voice. And when the house was full of visitors, Vine would entertain the young people with a violin or piano and have them laughing so hard they would cry.

Vine was a short, athletic man. He felt that getting regular, fresh air and exercise was part of his Christian stewardship. A powerful swimmer, he once rescued his son Edwin and two other boys in a choppy sea. Every year they would vacation at the seaside, swimming, rowing and sailing with the family.

### Spiritual Habits

Early rising and regularity in Bible reading and study were hallmarks of W. E. Vine's life. That should not surprise anyone who has read his work. But the fact that Vine could go in for a subjective and even mystical approach to the Word of God is unique. Cautious Bible students often disparage the subjective. But Vine could see that God can, and often does, guide His servants in a very personal way. "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way" ( Ps. 25:9 ). One example of this was in 1909. Mr. Vine was waiting on God for guidance about leaving the school where he taught with his brother Theodore and going to Bath to take responsibilities with the missionary magazine, Echoes of Service. He had an appointment at Cardiff, and on the Saturday morning while in prayer, with the Bible open before him at Deuteronomy 31 for his daily reading, he was confronted with verse 7: "Thou must go with this people." He was so struck with these words that he underlined them in his Bible. At the same time, his brother was to preach at Crediton on the Sunday. After being shown into his room, with his mind on his brother's moving to Bath, he decided to kneel in prayer before going downstairs. After rising from his knees, his eyes met a combination of texts on the wall: "I was left . . . With good will doing service as unto the Lord" ( Isa. 49:21 ; Eph. 6:7 ).

When Mr. Vine went to the school at Exeter on the morning after his return home, his brother greeted him with the remark, "I'm afraid you are going to leave me." Asked why, he told him about the texts he had seen on the wall. Mr. Vine then remarked how extraordinary it was that such texts should have confronted his brother, for he himself had been given the text that same day, "Thou must go with this people." Vine later related that through a series of seven small but connected circumstances, God definitely led him to take on the responsibilities at Echoes of Service.

### Missionary Statesman

It was in December, 1909, that Mr. Vine was asked by W. H. Bennet and R. E. Sparks of Echoes of Services, to join in the work at Bath. Echoes of Service is a monthly record of missionary efforts by laborers from the British Isles. The editors not only corresponded with hundreds of missionaries but also channeled funds from their home congregations. Vine handled as many as sixty to seventy letters a day,

many of them he personally answered, or dictated to his secretary. It was one of his remarkable characteristics that from early rising in the morning until late retirement at night he would fill every moment of his day with varied activities. During this time, he became a counselor and confidant to scores of workers who faced grave perplexities. Vine continued this work until his homecall in 1949.

### Literary Contributions

Mr. Vine was constantly preaching the Gospel and teaching the Scriptures. Around the year 1905, Mr. C. F. Hogg teamed up with Mr. Vine to conduct a correspondence course of Bible study. These studies in 1 Thessalonians and then in Galatians moved W. E. Vine into a wider sphere of influence. Thereafter his writing ministry expanded. His collected writings fill five large volumes (published by Gospel Tract Publishers of Glasgow). But surely his greatest contribution to the Church of God was his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. W. E. Vine has put all English-speaking Bible students in his debt. The English reader with little or no knowledge of Greek has, of course, concordances and lexicons. These provide a skeleton: Vine clothes it with the flesh and sinews of living exposition, and in so doing makes available for the ordinary reader the expert knowledge contained in the more advanced works. In a preface to the dictionary, W. E. Vine wrote: "In any work in which we engage as servants of Christ, His word ever applies, 'When ye shall have done all those things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do' ( Luke 17:10 ). So with the reminders given by the Apostle Paul, 'it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful . . . and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?' ( 1 Cor. 4:2 , 7 ). We ever have reason for humbling ourselves before God, for none of us knows yet as he ought to know, and at the Judgment Seat of Christ 'the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is' ( 1 Cor. 3:13 )."

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