

# A Competent Ministry

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*W.H. Griffith Thomas emphasizes the essential qualities of a competent ministry, focusing on gravity, prayer, and the centrality of Scripture in the life of a minister.*

**Scripture:** Acts 17:3

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

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas delves into the seven elements of a New Testament minister and his ministry as depicted in John Bunyan's writings, emphasizing the importance of gravity, prayer, the Bible, truthfulness, overcoming worldliness, pleading with men, and the hope of future reward. He stresses the need for ministers to embody gravity without gloom, maintain a life of prayer for spiritual power, and hold the Bible as their daily companion for strength and guidance. Thomas highlights the significance of truthfulness in speech and the necessity of overcoming worldliness in a minister's life to avoid pitfalls like excessive social indulgence, unworthy methods, ambition for power, and fear of man. He concludes by underlining the importance of pleading with men, being motivated by love for souls, and living with the future reward in mind as a powerful incentive for faithful service.

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## Transcript

In the writings of John Bunyan, that wonderful gallery of portraits, there are no less than seven pictures of the Christian minister. Evangelist, Interpreter, Great-heart, and the Four Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains (Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere), are all apparently intended to represent the Christian minister. Let us look at the first of these as found in the Pilgrim's Progress.

"Christian saw the picture of a very grave person hung up against the wall; and this was the fashion of it: it had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the law of truth was written upon his lips, the world was behind its back; it stood as if it pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over its head."  
[Pilgrim's Progress, R.T.S. Edition, p. 32.]

Here are seven elements of a New Testament minister and his ministry.

Section 1. "A Very Grave Person."

At the risk of repetition, because the matter is so important, we will say again that gravity is a leading feature of the requirements of the Christian life emphasized by St. Paul in the Pastoral Epistles. The

Bishop is to have "his children in subjection with all gravity" (1 Tim. 3:4). The Deacon, as we have already seen, is to be "grave" (1 Tim. 3:8). The aged men are to be "grave" (Titus 2:2). In addition there are several exhortations to sobriety and sober-mindedness (1 Tim. 2:9, 15; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8, 2:4, 6, 12). And the very warnings indicate the same need, because the Apostle specially guards his readers against lightness and shallowness and inexperience (1 Tim. 3:6, 5:13; 2 Tim. 3:4).

No one can doubt the need of gravity in the minister, for his whole work is concerned with the deepest, most solemn, and most "awe-full" realities. But gravity does not, and cannot mean gloom, for that is as far removed from New Testament spirituality as flippancy. There is nothing gloomy about New Testament Christianity, nothing even pensive or wistful. The modern pensiveness is wholly foreign to the New Testament. But in like manner there is nothing light or trivial or shallow about New Testament religion and New Testament ministry. The clergyman has to do with eternal verities; God, Christ, Redemption, Holiness, Heaven. He has to emphasize Sin, Salvation, Grace, Truth. He has to call for Repentance, Faith, Surrender, Consecration, Obedience. He has to warn against Unbelief, Ungodliness, Unrighteousness, Indifference. He has to proclaim Righteousness, Temperance and Judgment to come. Where, then, is the place for lightness? It is excluded. Where is the place for gloom? Equally excluded. Where is the place for gravity, earnestness, seriousness? It is found everywhere. A clergyman will probably often find it difficult to steer clear of both extremes, but he is just as likely to repel by flippancy as by gloom; and if he obtains the reputation of being jocular, a fine raconteur, a first-rate, because humorous, platform speaker, people will expect these things from him more and more, and in the long run will judge him accordingly. A man can be as bright, as joyous, as exuberant as the New Testament allows (and this means a very great deal), and yet with this, he will be restrained, sober, grave, and ever mindful of his Master's business.

## Section 2. "Eyes Lifted Up To Heaven."

This element of the description refers to prayer in the life of a minister. It has always been prominent in the lives of believers of all ages, from the earliest Old Testament days to the present moment. Much more so, then, must it be prominent in the lives of Christian ministers. To "continue instant in prayer" is one of the most urgent needs.

### I. Prayer in Relation to Spiritual Life.

It is the means of expressing and maintaining our right attitude to God. The true attitude of the soul is a complex one of submission, desire, trust, and fellowship. Surrender, followed by aspiration, continued by dependence, and culminating in fellowship, is our attitude; and for all this we need and must have constant prayer. Prayer enters into every element and aspect of our hidden life. Would we be right and true and strong within? Let us pray.

Prayer, too, leads to the constant realization of the presence of God. "His presence is salvation." The peace of His presence, calming; the joy of His presence, cheering; the light of His presence, guiding; the glory of His presence, irradiating. And all this is made real by prayer.

Then by prayer the will of God is made clear to us. The perceptions of the soul are clarified. The balance of the soul is poised. The determinations of the soul are strengthened. We "perceive and know what things we ought to do," and that sure mark of spiritual growth, αἰσθησις, "perception," becomes ours in an ever-increasing measure as we "pray, always pray."

## II. Prayer in Relation to Spiritual Power.

Who does not realize constantly "the plague of his own heart!" Who is not ever confronted with the terrible fact and awful possibilities of "indwelling sin!" Yet who does not also know that prayer is power, because it brings power. The heart becomes garrisoned, the conscience is made more sensitive, the will is strengthened, and the soul is protected on every side.

Who does not know, too, the power of temptation and the hideous possibilities of backsliding! Yet here also prayer spells power, for it arms us against temptation so that "nothing shall by any means hurt" us. And it guards against backsliding by keeping the crevices of the soul intact, and preserving against leakage.

Who does not also feel at times the tendency to slacken in service, and to regard his work as a burden! Prayer makes duty light and service delightful. We are "strengthened with all might," and become "ready for every good work," and then His yoke is easy, and to serve Him is to reign (*Cui servire est regnare*). His service is perfect freedom when prayer lubricates the life.

## III. Prayer in Relation to Spiritual Service.

Our most immediate need in this connection is constant blessing on our own work. We need and long for blessing in it and on it. This will come through prayer, because prayer envelops us in the Divine power, and we go to our work with the seal of God's presence and influence upon us. "Power" and "authority" are closely connected in things spiritual, and to be clothed with spiritual "power" through prayer will assuredly invest us with a moral and spiritual "authority" from and for Christ that will make itself felt wherever we go, and in whatever we do.

The power that comes through prayer will enlarge our sympathies as we work, enlighten our mind with truth, and ensure acceptance for our message. Prayer will help with the sermon because first it helps with the man himself, and the sermon then becomes the overflow of his experience. In a word, there is no part of our service where prayer is not power.

"Two preachers, speaking once about a simple 'Quaker,' who had delivered a discourse full of remarkable power, confessed themselves puzzled that a man of such slender ability should produce such a wonderful effect. Said one, 'He really speaks as if he echoed God.' To which a bystander replied, 'You are right, for Brother -- lives so near to God that he hears what the most of us miss.'"

This is the conclusion of the whole matter - our service will be all right if the servant is right.

Another clamant need in service is a deeper fellowship with God's purposes for the world. The "chief end of Divine revelation" is the extension of the knowledge of redeeming love to all the world; and it is essential to all true Christian life and service that we realize this, and at the same time become conscious of our share in the fulfillment of it. Now, it is by prayer we enter in this region, and view all things from this standpoint. As the soul goes on praying, it soon begins to realize, in an ever-deepening measure, the existence and need of other souls, and it does not rest until within its ken and upon its heart are "all souls". Would we enter into the heart of God for the world? Let us pray.

Once more, we shall become deeply assured that our bounden duty, and perhaps our chief duty, for these souls is intercession. We can never forget that in the great ascending climax of our Lord's work, in Rom. 8, His intercession crowns all. Nor can we fail to realize the fact that His continued ability to save completely

is based on His eternal life of intercession (Heb. 7:25).

#### IV. Prayer in Relation to Spiritual Attitude.

If these "things are wrought by prayer," it behooves us to ask how we may obtain the results, what attitude of soul must be taken up? The first will be an attitude of listening: "I will hear what God the Lord will speak." The second will be an attitude of trust; believing that God hears prayer. The third will be an attitude of expectation; feeling confident that God answers prayer. The fourth will be an attitude of continuance; assured that, though God delays, the answer will "surely come" (Hab. 2:3). The word used for continuance in prayer indicates one of the deepest secrets of the prayer life (προσκαρτερειν), including steadfastness and earnestness. Its use in other places gives special point to its association with power (Mark 3:9, Acts 2:42, 6:4, 8:13).

V. Prayer in Relation to Spiritual Requirements. It follows inevitably from what has been said that the attitude of the soul depends on certain conditions being fulfilled, and these are four in number. 1. The Holy Spirit must be honoured. He is the "Spirit of grace and supplication" (Zech. 12:10). He intercedes within and renders assistance against our foes (Rom. 8:26, Greek). He is closely associated with prayer by St. Paul (Eph. 6:11), and by St. Jude (verse 20). No acceptable prayer can be made which does not find its source in the Holy Spirit of God.

But when we pray "in the Holy Ghost" we begin to know and feel the power of prayer. 2. The Word of God must be utilized. Prayer is fed by promise. The Bible is at once the fuel and the food of prayer. Holy Scripture is the warrant of prayer, is full of examples of prayer, encouragements to prayer, instructions on prayer, and assurances about prayer. If in prayer we speak to God, in the Bible God speaks to us; and the connection between the two is close, intimate, essential, and inextricable.

No one will pray long without feeling the need of his Bible, because he must know the character of "Him with Whom we have to do." 3. Intercession must be prominent. It is a startling thought to realize that Samuel felt it would be a sin against God if he ceased intercessory prayer (1 Sam. 12:23). And Job found blessing for himself, "when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42:10). We may well ask ourselves what place intercession has in our present devotions. Does it come last or first?

Is it summarized or detailed? Is it hurried or extended? May we not say that a clergyman's spiritual life may be gauged by the place occupied in it by intercessory prayer? Intercession then must not only be definite but predominant in our life; it must occupy not a small but a prominent part of our daily prayer life; and as we enter more fully into the possibilities of prayer, our life of priestly intercession will be a life of ever-extending influence and power for God. 4. Method and habit must be adopted and maintained.

For the attitude of prayer we must have times. Attitude is based on acts, and times of prayer are necessary as the occasions of storage and accumulation of light, power, and grace. And these times must be daily. Not a day should pass without a definite going aside with God for solitary prayer. Our time may not be long, but it must be regular, and so from the act will come the habit, and from the habit the attitude. And the time must be well spent by method in prayer. Every man will doubtless have his own plan of "sacra privata," but some plan is essential.

A loose-leaf book arranged under the headings of Intercession and Prayer, covering a week, or two weeks, or four weeks, is a very helpful plan, giving two pages to each day; one for Intercession, and the other for Prayer and Praise. In association with this, Dr. Andrew Murray's booklet, *Helps to Intercession*,

will be a valuable adjunct, while cycles of missionary prayers can also be utilized. Dr. Harford's Daily will give suggestions of other methods and topics; but whatever be the method, some systematization of our times of private prayer seems essential, and so far from proving a burden, it will minister to the truest "liberty of the Spirit," and leave ample room for the constant outpourings of the soul from day to day.

One thing is certain, that in the secret place the clergyman's soul will find its supreme place and power and promise of progress. From the attitude of prayer will come a character settled, sane, strong, and abiding, wherein God's presence will be more and more a delight and God's power more and more realized. [For further suggestions on private prayer perhaps the writer may be allowed to refer to chapter 2 of his little book, Life Abiding and Abounding.]

### Section 3. "The Best of Books In His Hand."

The Minister with the Bible is the obvious suggestion of this part of Bunyan's picture. And much, very much, will depend thereon. What are the chief elements in the attitude of a clergyman to Holy Scripture.

#### I. A Deep Conviction.

"The best of books." The minister ought to be assured of this as one of the unshakeable convictions of his soul.

1. Best, because of whence it comes. It comes from God. If the Bible is not in some sense God's Book, it is nothing to the Christian minister; and if he is not in some way convinced of this, the Book will be and do nothing in his work.

2. Best, because of Whom it reveals. It reveals Christ. Christ is the beginning, the end, the Alpha, the Omega, the sum and substance of Holy Scripture. Apart from Christ the Bible is nothing. The supreme value of the Scriptures is that they "testify of Him". And if the clergyman cannot see Christ in the Bible and make Christ the sum and substance of his message, he has nothing to do with Christ or the Bible.

3. Best, because of what it does. It brings Salvation. It is the book of Redemption, the book of the Way to God, the book of Grace and Glory. It tells of Pardon for the past, Power for the present, and Peace for the future. And if the clergyman is not able to say, "To you is the word of this salvation sent," he probably knows nothing about Salvation or the Bible.

This must be the supreme conviction of the Christian minister. The Bible as the revelation of Christ, Christ as the Interpreter of the Bible. God as the Source of its message, the Giver of its salvation, and the Guarantee of its holiness. And when in the power of the indwelling, illuminating Spirit the clergyman proclaims these truths, he soon knows by practical experience that the Bible is the best of books.

II. A Daily Companion. The Bible is of supreme and vital importance to the life of the minister. All the graces and blessings are mediated through this channel of revelation. 1. Rest of Soul comes through the Scriptures. "Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165). There is no more precious experience than that which comes through the regular exercise of the soul with the Bible. 2. Purity of Soul follows from the same source. The cleansing efficacy of the truth (John 15:2-3, Eph. 5:26) has its blessed results on the thoughts, the motives, the desires of the soul.

Nothing can compare with the Scriptures for producing soul purity. 3. Courage comes through the Word of God in the soul. Christianity can never be popular, or easy; it makes too many and too great demands. It

needs courage, bravery, fortitude; and for these there is nothing like the power of Holy Scripture. In the face of difficulty, discouragement, depression, despondency, and temptation to despair, the Word will hearten and cheer, and send us afresh on our way rejoicing. 4.

Inward power is another result of this "best of books". It is easy to preach; it is not so easy to live. The Christian secret of true living is αὐτάρκεια, "self-sufficiency," and yet not self-sufficiency, but "Christ-sufficiency," for it is "not I, but Christ". "I can do all things," says St. Paul; true, but "in Him Who strengtheneth me." When a man has tasted of the good Word of God it is not surprising if he knows the meaning of "My grace is sufficient (ἀρκεῖ) for thee." 5.

Outward power is from the same source. There are temptations to be overcome, and duties to perform, and for these the minister needs power, Divine power. His motto should be Resistere, Insistere, Persistere, and this is only possible through the Scriptures. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you" (1 John 2:14). 6. Clearness of vision is not the least important and essential element of the ministerial life which comes inevitably from the Bible.

It is a mark of a maturing Christian that he "knows". All the latest Epistles emphasize this (ἐπιγνώσις, Eph 1:17, Phil. 1:9, Col. 1:10; 2 Peter 1:2, 2:20; 1 John 2:3, and passim). The "little children" in Christ may rejoice in the possession of sins forgiven, and a knowledge of the Father. The "young men" may glory in their strength. But "the fathers" are marked by "knowledge" of the Eternal One, and than this there is nothing higher (1 John 2:12-14). Spiritual insight is one of the most precious, most essential, and most potent elements in the life of a Christian minister, and it comes from God through the Scriptures. 7.

Reserve force is an essential for the ministry, and it comes from God through the Scriptures. One of the dangers of the ministry is an inner unrest, an absence of reserve of power, a tendency to limit ourselves to our weekly output of work. We tire, or we find ourselves at the mercy of some critical discussion, or it may be some intellectual dissipation. It is just here that the Bible will provide the needed counterpoise. It will give a fresh atmosphere, a new outlook, an anchorage of soul.

Constant meditation of the Bible will give freshness of spirit, capacity for usefulness, readiness for emergencies, persistence in service. The man will last, and his ministry abide and increase in fruitfulness.

### III. A Definite Duty.

1. We must go to our Bible regularly. We must get alone with God through His Word. Someone has said that morning devotion anchors the soul so that it will not drift far away.

2. We must receive from our Bible directly. Whatever else we may learn from others, what we get from God direct is of fundamental importance. The Bible must be our "Enchiridion". We shall find it useful to keep one Bible solely for devotional purposes, and especially a Greek Testament. It should be entirely without marks or notes, in order that we may come to the most familiar passage unfettered by old ideas, and thus receive something fresh for daily need, new manna for new requirements.

3. We must apply the Bible practically. The purpose of devotion is personal need, and not the need of our flock. It is a constant temptation to a clergyman to read his Bible with others in view, but in the secret place this must be resolutely set aside and resisted. "What saith my Lord unto His servant?" is the one and constant thought. The Word of God must be allowed to criticize us (κριτικῆς, Heb. 4:12), to sift, test, guide, warn, cheer, purify, guard, bless us. And when the Bible is all this to us, we shall go forth to our

work with "the best of books in our hands"; strong in the Lord to preach and live the Word of His grace in Christ Jesus. [For further consideration of the Bible as a book of devotion, the writer ventures to refer again to his little book, Life Abiding and Abounding (Chapter 1).]

#### Section 4. "The Law of Truth Was Written Upon His Lips."

This element of Bunyan's picture of the minister is clearly taken from Malachi's description of the true prophet: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips" (Ch. 2:6). And as we ponder it, we shall find that it consists of several important points.

##### I. Testimony.

The "lips" imply utterance, and suggest that the preacher has a message to deliver. If he has not something to say, he might as well not be a minister of the Gospel. He must have a message, personal and definite, the announcement of the Good News, "the word of the truth of the Gospel."

But it means still more than this. It assumes that he delivers his message, that he has something to say and says it. Two questions will ever confront the preacher of the Gospel: What am I going to say? Have I said it? His message is "the truth." "The law of truth was written upon his lips." God is the God of truth (Deut. 32:4). Christ is the Truth (John 14:6). The Divine Word is truth (John 17:17). And the minister is sent to bear witness to the truth. He is to proclaim "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." There are few things more definitely emphasized in the New Testament than the Gospel as truth and the disciples as witnesses. St. Paul makes this truth clear when he declares that he had kept back nothing and had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). This is the call today to the Christian minister, to proclaim by lip and life the truth of God, to withhold nothing, to reveal all God's will, "Whether they hear or whether they forbear."

And he will find a frequent and pressing temptation to tone down the truth and even to hold it back. There will be social prejudices, intellectual prejudices, political prejudices, ecclesiastical prejudices, and even spiritual prejudices to encounter, and unless the minister seeks to be faithful, some modification of the full-orbed Gospel will almost inevitably be made. He will need courage if he is to be true to God's truth in its fullness. This is the burden of St. Paul's messages to Timothy. "Be strong"; "Be not ashamed." And with this agrees his warning to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it" (Col. 4:17). And yet faithfulness and courage will not mean bitterness or hardness, or narrowness, but a simple, straightforward, loving presentation of God's eternal and unchangeable verity. "Speaking (or living) the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15, Greek).

##### III. Sincerity.

Truth on the lips presupposes something farther back, "truth in the inward parts," which means sincerity. If we are to speak truly, we must think truly, and feel truly.

There will be sincerity of motive. Whether in seeking the ministry, or in exercising it, sincerity will dominate our life, and without it moral failure and disaster will be the inevitable result.

And from sincerity of motive will spring sincerity of speech. There will be no exaggeration and no flattery. "That ye may be sincere." Trench says that ειλικρινεις (Phil. 1:10) means freedom from falsehood, and it is generally supposed to come from ειλ and κρινω, "to judge in the sunlight," to be held up to the light and seen to be "transparent". The emphasis on sincerity in the New Testament is very significant and

searching (1 Cor. 5:8; 2 Cor. 2:17; 2 Peter 3:1).

Testimony, Faithfulness, Sincerity; these three, and they are one. The man who possesses them is a man after God's own heart; he is not ashamed of the results of past scrutiny (Psalm 139:1), and he is not afraid to submit himself again to the same unerring testimony (Psalm 139:23f.). He lives in the sunlight of God's presence, God's truth, God's Spirit; he knows that if he regards iniquity in his heart, the Lord will not hear him; and he knows that the Word of God is a mirror (James 1:23-25), a discerner (Heb. 4:12), a hammer (Jer. 23:29), and that if he hides that Word in his heart, he will not sin against God (Psalm 119:11).

#### Section 5. "The World Was Behind Its Back."

A very difficult question is here raised, and yet one that has to be faced in every true ministry. It is what St. John calls "the love of the world". Let us listen carefully to the Apostolic words: - "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

The contrast here is striking: "The love of the world," and "the love of the Father". St. Paul's version is "Love seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. 13:5). But let us look the difficulties full in the face.

#### I. What is Worldliness?

No one doubts or even questions the reference to the actual evil of the world. "The lust of the eyes and the pride of life." Two words depict the power of this worldliness, "desire," and "boasting". Or, as our Catechism puts it, "the pomps and vanity of this wicked world". The boastfulness, show, glitter, emptiness of sin is to be spurned and rejected. This is a matter of course.

But the problem lies on what has well been called the "borderlines in the field of doubtful practices" (H. C. Trumbull). There are certain forms of social amusement generally described as "worldly," like the theatre and the ballroom, and as to these, the questions are often raised "Are they wrong?" "And if so, why and how?" It is of course impossible to lay down any hard and fast line, to say that this is worldly, and that is not. But, speaking generally, worldliness betrays itself in its atmosphere. There is a something undefined, perhaps undefinable, and yet very real, that betokens a lowering of the spiritual atmosphere, a check on the spiritual vitality. It is for every man to face this problem for himself and to settle it; but it may be suggested for consideration and perhaps for guidance that anything that tends to make prayer, Bible meditation, and Christian fellowship less enjoyable is to be avoided as essentially "worldly". In most cases the questions relating to amusement, society, and the rest can be settled by a reference to our Master, His presence, and His will. It may not be possible to discover "What would Jesus do?" but it is certainly possible to ask, "What would Jesus have me do?" The Pauline question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" is still capable of many and varied applications. But we must come a little closer home to the actualities of ministerial life. The principle of worldliness may be difficult of explanation, but the practice may often and easily be depicted.

II. What is Worldliness in a Minister? It may take various forms, and among them are the following. 1. The minister may show his worldliness by a too great fondness for social life and pleasure. There is of course no reference here to anything inherently wrong, but only to an abuse of the legitimate. "More men are killed by meat than by poison." It was said of a clergyman that he was always sure to be found at his club. Could anything much less satisfactory be meant and said of him?

A clergyman may easily obtain the reputation of a diner-out; and though he may be scrupulously abstemious in food and drink, he will suffer in the eyes of many rightminded people by his undue love of the purely social in life. This is no plea for severe asceticism or rigid exclusiveness. Far from it. It only means that the social element must be carefully watched. Recreation, whatever its form, must be re-creation, or it will fail and do positive harm. 2. He may show his worldliness by resorting to unworthy methods.

He may be tempted to indulge in sensationalism in his preaching, to excessive advertisement of his Church and parish, to be content with a low standard of preaching, to adopt secular methods which attract crowds without doing real spiritual work. The spirit of these things is essentially and fundamentally worldly, and the man who yields to it will find it eating like a canker into his spiritual life. 3. He may show his worldliness by means of ambition for place and power. There are some men who are ever seeking preferment, and who apply for almost every vacancy that occurs.

They take steps directly and indirectly to put themselves before patrons of livings, and use every effort to get themselves appointed. Fortunately, patrons generally "see through" these methods, and discount the men who use them, and there are many patrons who feel saddened and humiliated at the thought of what some clergymen will do to obtain preferment. It may not be absolutely necessary, or even wise, to go to the other extreme of never applying for a post, because there are certain positions which cannot be obtained without due and proper application.

But the general principle is beyond question, and the cases where applications are necessary and should be made are exceedingly few. A man must take reasonable care for his own affairs, especially if he is married and has others dependent on him, but great and constant consideration will be necessary as to what is "reasonable care". The clergyman is called to self-sacrifice, and people are always impressed by his readiness to sacrifice himself. He will not blazon this before men but live it before God, and in the long run (even if it is long) it will tell.

There is scarcely anything more prejudicial to spiritual life, progress, and power, than ambition for place in the Church. 4. And he may show his worldliness by the fear of man. This is protean in shape, but dangerous in every guise. It is possible to shape our opinions and actions with a view to possible advancement. It is possible to frame our message so as to please man rather than God (Gal. 1:10). Our spiritual enthusiasm may easily give place to an essentially worldly prudence that gives a tone and character to everything in our ministry.

And if we yield to this temptation, we shall lose our high ideals, introduce slackness into our study, and perfunctoriness into our work. Our visiting will be mechanical, our preaching halfhearted, and our whole ministry joyless, barren, and useless.

### III. How can Worldliness be Overcome?

"The world was behind its back." A definite act of repudiation and rejection has been performed, and the choice has been irreversibly made. Opportunities will come again to test us; calls to sacrifice may seem harder at times than ever; specious forms of the worldly spirit will approach us in disguise; and the temptation will still meet us full in the face. But soon the fresh decision will have been made, the die cast, and the repudiation once again effected. "We are not ignorant of his devices," will be our experience, and with that spiritual insight which comes from God Himself we shall claim and win the victory.

But this will mean "God first". Our motto must ever be, "I have set the Lord always before me." It is only by "the expulsive power" of a new and stronger affection that "the love of the world" will be overcome. Only by "the love of the Father" will the other love be displaced and dispossessed.

And this will produce such joy in Christ and His service that nothing else will compare with it for spiritual satisfaction. He will be supreme, preeminent, all in all, and in this will be protection, power, and peace. Our prayer will be "Teach me to do Thy will." "Not my will, but Thine be done." Our meat will be "to do the will of Him that sent" us, and we shall be fully assured that while the world passeth away, "he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

## Section 6. "It Stood As If It Pleaded With Men."

There cannot be much doubt that this line of the ministerial portrait comes from St. Paul's great word, "As though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead" (2 Cor. 5:20).

### I. What is it to plead?

First it means to state the truth. Like St. Paul, we must "open and set before" (Acts 17:3). Then, it means to urge reasons for the acceptance of the truth. "He reasoned" (Acts 17:3). And lastly, it means to persuade to acceptance; "persuading" (Acts 18:4). This is the meaning of what Dr. J. H. Jowett has called "the wooing note," the thought underlying the well-known word, "Jesu, lover of my soul". Like the Baptist, the Christian minister must be a friend of the Bridegroom, and as such, point men to Him and persuade them to accept Him. The persuasion and the persuasiveness of the Christian ministry will ever be among its strongest, most dominant, and characteristic notes. The absence of it in much modern preaching is an incomparable loss to preacher and to hearer. The Gospel is intended for acceptance, and while we cannot compel, we ought to use every endeavour to impel by persuading men.

### II. What are the Secrets of Pleading?

1. A supreme conviction of the truth of the Divine Word. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). Is this a dominant note of our ministry? Nothing in criticism, history, or philosophy must ever be allowed to blot out from mind and heart the absolute certainty of the Divine truth.

2. A keen sense of man's need. "Lost" is a word very seldom heard today, and yet it expresses a New Testament truth of the profoundest meaning and magnitude. Souls are in danger of being lost, whether we realize it or not, and no one can read the New Testament without feeling that the words "saved" and "lost" refer to the most vital issues of life. We shall not be able to describe the full extent and content of what is involved in being "lost," but the Master's Word, "these shall go away" is quite enough, for "away" means banished from God and from all that this implies of love and light, peace and purity, holiness and hope. And the minister who knows something of the New Testament teaching on this profound subject will never fail to "persuade" men.

3. A real love for the souls of men. This is one of the supreme requirements of a true ministry. Not merely must we love ideas but men, not only truth but lives, not only congregations but individuals. Like the Master Himself Who hungered for men, we must seek the same spirit, and when we get it we shall indeed plead and persuade.

4. A deep love for the Saviour. The supreme force in the Apostle's life was "the love of Christ," and this not merely his own love to the Lord Jesus, but the Lord's love to him. It was this that "constrained" him,

"hemmed him in" (2 Cor. 5:14, συμ■χεται), and impelled him to live for Christ, not for himself. When this love fills every crevice of life, it is felt to be "so amazing, so divine," that it "Demands our soul, our life, our all".

And in the power and glow of this love we plead, and persuade, and beseech men to be reconciled to God.

### III. What are the Guarantees of this Pleading?

As fuel to the fire, so will certain conditions affect our ministry.

1. Meditation on the Word of God will do much to make our ministry a "pleading" and "beseeching" ministry. "Thy Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jer. 20:9). The heart warmed and burning with the fire of Divine truth "cannot but speak," and speak in terms of loving, earnest pleading with men.

2. The power of the Holy Spirit will be another means of fulfilling this pleading ministry. What people need above everything is a ministry of the Word in the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. Dr. J. H. Jowett in his invaluable little book, *The Passion for Souls*, tells of a pitman who said of his Vicar, "You have only to shake that man's hand to feel that he is full of the Holy Ghost." Could any testimony be finer? Could anything be more humiliating to many of us in the face of our many failures? The Word and the Spirit. The Word through the Spirit, and the Spirit in the Word. These two, filling the heart, sensitizing the conscience, and ruling the will are the simple, sufficient secrets of a ministry that pleads with men and does not plead in vain.

### Section 7. "A Crown of Gold Did Hang Over Its Head."

There are many incentives in Christianity. One is the hope of future reward. "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (2 John 8). In the long line of worthies in Hebrews 11 the future bulks largely, and "the recompense of reward" was a great power for faithful endurance. The Lord Jesus Himself used this truth in His teaching (Matt. 24-25), and the Apocalypse sounds a similar note in almost every part of its great vision of the future.

#### I. The Promised Prospect.

There are four "crowns" prepared for the followers of Christ and associated with the great future. (a) The Crown of Life, as the reward of faithfulness (Rev. 2:10). (b) The Crown of Righteousness, as the outcome of strenuous endurance (2 Tim. 4:7-8). (c) The Crown of Rejoicing, as the acknowledgment of soul-winning (1 Thess. 2:19-20). (d) The Crown of Glory, as the acknowledgment of true service (1 Peter 5:4).

All these will be found to refer to Service not to Salvation. St. Paul longed to see his converts living so faithfully that in the great day it would be seen that he had not laboured "in vain" (Phil. 2:16), and he encouraged the Church at Corinth by telling them to be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). No one can read the New Testament without being conscious of this great incentive, the prospect promised "to them that love Him".

#### II. The Present Power.

The future is intended to be an inspiration to the present. We are to work in the hope and prospect of hearing the Master's "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." We are to labour with the thought of winning men to Christ and then of presenting our converts at the Court on High (Col. 1:28), and of having the supreme joy of saying, "Behold I and the children whom Thou hast given me" (Heb. 2:13). Surely the inspiration of such a prospect should be a great power in our life.

But the responsibility is also great. We may lose our reward. While there may be no question of our salvation, there may be of our faithfulness; no thought of losing heaven, but certainly of losing our right position there. The labourer may be without sheaves, his soul saved, but his life lost. Miss Havergal tells of an old servant to whom she had never spoken for Christ, but who, when led to Christ by someone else said, "Miss Fanny, I might have been yours." There is a solemn and searching truth in the New Testament that does not seem to have had the attention it deserves. I mean the possibility of grief at the Advent of Christ. When we are reminded of "shame before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28), when we are exhorted to perfect love in order that "we may have boldness in the day of judgment," we are surely to understand the possibility of something like shame and fear in that great day. St. Paul speaks of the Christian who builds upon the foundation, wood, hay, and stubble, and then of the fire trying every man's work of what sort it is. There is no question of salvation here, but only of faithful service. "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Cor. 3:11-15). All this is in strict accord with our Lord's solemn exhortation to "watch and pray" in order that we "may be accounted worthy ... to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). It stands to reason that if a Christian man does not follow after holiness, does not attempt the work of soul-winning, and does not render God any faithful service, he cannot experience the same assurance of satisfaction as that which pertains to the faithful soldier and servant of the Master. Be it ours, therefore, so to live in our Lord's presence and so to be faithful to His momentary grace, that we may lift up our face without spot on that day and rejoice before Him with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Bunyan showed, here as elsewhere, his unerring spiritual insight in including this element in his picture of a Christian minister. The future must affect the present. Judgment must begin at the house of God; and if we are to be workmen who need not to be ashamed when He appears, we must live and labour in the light of that great and awful day.

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