

The Ministry of St. Paul

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

St. Paul's ministry is characterized by sincerity, certitude, and limitations, emphasizing the importance of living in the searchlight of truth, praying for guidance, and being transparent in actions and speech.

Topics: "Christian Ministry", "Pastoral Leadership"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas preaches about the importance of the Christian ministry, focusing on the qualities of sincerity, certitude, limitations, responsibility, aspects, and the foundation of the ministry. He emphasizes the need for ministers to have genuine sincerity in motive, speech, and action, to be certain in their faith in Christ, to persuade others with fear and love, and to represent Christ as ambassadors of reconciliation. Thomas highlights the significance of character in the ministry, urging ministers to live a life that commends their service to God through suffering, action, and being, all rooted in a deep communion with God through prayer and the Bible.

Transcript

There is one Epistle in which more than in any other St. Paul lays bare his heart and soul. It is 2 Corinthians, which is his Apologia in the face of opposition, animosity, and calumny. Stung to the quick by the charges, taunts, and actions of his enemies, he reveals himself as he does nowhere else, and in so doing he lets us see some of the outstanding qualifications of all true ministry. A few of these, out of the many references to his life and work, call for special meditation.

Section 1. Sincerity (2 Cor. 1:12, 2:17, 4:2). I. The Apostle's Statements. 1. He had evidently been charged with insincerity, especially in writing (verse 13), and he replies by challenging attention to the boasting of which he was never tired. "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward." (a) First, he speaks of his life in the world, and especially in relation to them.

It was "a walk up and down" (ἀναστροφῆ) and was as public as it could well be as they in particular knew (περισσοτέρως δε προς υμας). How fearless was the challenge! (b) Next, he names the positive elements of his life. "In holiness (or "singleness," A.V.), and godly sincerity." (c) Then, he mentions the secret of it all: "Not in fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God." It was this complete and utter fearlessness of conscience that could make him freely ask their prayers (verse 11), especially as his letters (verse 13), and also his life, had been unambiguous, straight, and true. 2.

But his work as well as his character had been questioned (ch. 2:17), and to this he now turns his attention. He repels the charge with scorn and makes it recoil on the head of his enemies. (a) "We are not as the many corrupting the Word of God." The word "corrupting" is vivid and arresting. It refers to the huckster who gave bad measure, and to the dishonest tavern keeper who adulterated his goods. We, says the great Apostle, are not men of this sort, "making merchandise of the Word of God." (b) On the contrary, "as of sincerity," yea more "as of God," "in God's presence" and "in Christ" he spoke his Master's message.

It is a terrible thing for a man to qualify or modify the Gospel in any way, tempering its severity, compromising its righteousness, or lowering its standard. To insert our own ideas is to "play the huckster" with the Word of the living God. 3. Once again St. Paul refers to his sincerity (ch. 4:2). "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

Another charge had probably been made, this time of deceit and cunning. It is an awful thing to impute motives, for of necessity it tends to destroy confidence. (a) He had "foresworn the hidden things of baseness." (b) He was not walking in craft or unprincipled trickery. (c) He had not proclaimed the Word with guile or deceit. (d) But by manifestation of the truth he was continually recommending himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. The one and only end and object of preaching is to proclaim and manifest the truth in such a way as that it shall have its due effect on human hearts in the sight of God, and the preacher must take special care that no hindrance to the full manifestation comes from himself.

As Denney finely says: "One great hindrance to its manifestation may easily be its treatment by the preacher himself. If he wishes to do anything else at the same time, the manifestation will not take effect. If he wishes, in the very act of preaching, to conciliate a class, or an interest, to create an opinion in favour of his own learning, ability or eloquence; to enlist sympathy for a cause or an institution which is only accidentally connected with the Gospel - the truth will not be seen, and it will not tell." [The Expositor's Bible, p. 146.]

And this is only possible as the preacher applies the truth to his own conscience (ch. 1:12), and commends it to the consciences of others (ch. 4:2). To quote Denney again:- "Conscience is not the abstract logical faculty in man, and the preacher's business is therefore not to prove, but to proclaim, the Gospel. All he has to do is to let it be seen, and the more nakedly visible it is the better. His object is not to frame an irrefragable argument, but to produce an irresistible impression.

There is no such thing as an argument to which it is impossible for a willful man to make objections. ... But there is such a thing as an irresistible impression - an impression made upon the moral nature against which it is vain to attempt any protest; an impression which subdues and holds the soul forever." [The Expositor's Bible, p. 147.]

II. The Present Application. As we ponder the Apostle's hot, burning repudiation, what do we learn for the ministry? 1. Sincerity of Motive. If we are seeking the ministry, or if we are exercising our ministry for anything short of the highest motives, we shall fail and suffer untold trouble. Simplicity versus duplicity is the prime essential, no *arriere pensee*, but a single eye to the glory of God. The word rendered "sincerity" in chapter 2:17, is said by Trench to mean transparency, that which is judged in the sunlight, and found to be free from speck, or spot, or stain. 2.

Sincerity of Speech. This is as important as sincerity of motive. There must be no exaggerations, no flattery, no withholding of the truth, but absolute frankness in declaring the message, whether men hear or whether they forbear. 3. Sincerity of Action. The possibilities of danger here are various. Sometimes avarice is the temptation; at others the desire for popularity at the expense_ of faithfulness; at others, again, the use of unlawful means to bring about spiritual results; and, yet again, the personal ambition which thinks of self only in the ministry.

This solemn question of "adulterating" the Word of God needs the most careful attention from all who are, or intend to be, ministers of the Gospel. Adulteration is practiced in trade for various reasons. (a) To increase the bulk of the goods, and thereby to increase the seller's gain. (b) To cater to particular tastes. (c) To beat competitors. But the results invariably are to (a) depreciate the real value of food; (b) degrade the business; (c) deceive the customer, and (d) deprave the seller.

The application of this to the ministry is as evident as it is searching. "There are two separable ideas here. One is that of men qualifying the Gospel, infiltrating their own ideas into the Word of God, tempering its severity, or perhaps its goodness, veiling its inexorableness, dealing in compromise. The other is that all such proceedings are faithless and dishonest, because some private interest underlies them. It need not be avarice, though it is as likely to be this as anything else.

A man corrupts the Word of God, makes it the stock in trade of a paltry business of his own in many other ways than by subordinating it to the need of a livelihood. When he exercises his calling as a minister for the gratification of his vanity, he does so. When he preaches not that awful message in which life and death are bound up, but himself, his cleverness, his learning, his humour, his fine voice even, or fine gestures, he does so. He makes the Word minister to him, instead of being a minister of the Word; and that is the essence of the sin.

It is the same if ambition be his motive, if he preaches to win disciples to himself, to gain an ascendancy over souls, to become the head of a party which will bear the impress of his mind. There was something of this at Corinth; and not only there, but wherever it is found, such a spirit and such interests will change the character of the Gospel. It will not be preserved in that integrity, in that simple, uncompromising, absolute character which it has as revealed in Christ.

Have another interest in it than that of God, and that interest will inevitably colour it. You will make it what it was not, and the virtue will depart from it." [Denney, *The Expositor's Bible*, 2 Corinthians, p. 97 f.] Bishop Moule tells of a Cambridge clergyman who had an empty church, but even men who seldom attended would have sent for him if they were dying. Men inevitably detect the spurious and the genuine in the long run. The majority may not, but the spiritual few will, for "he that is spiritual discerneth all things."

And woe be to the minister who has been "found out" by the spiritually minded among his people. Thus a man must be right all round; right with his message, right with himself, right with his Master. Nothing can make up for simple sincerity in the ministry.

III. The Simple Secret.

How is this to be accomplished? How is so high an ideal to be realized? As everything else in the Christian life, in a very simple way.

1. Live in the searchlight of truth. Listen to the Apostle; "before God," "of God," "in Christ". He lived "under the Great Task Master's eye," and in that scrutiny he had no fear of man's words or deeds. "They say. What do they say? Let them say." The man who prays "Search me, O God," will add, "Thou hast searched one," and the result will be satisfaction unspeakable even amid slanders otherwise unbearable.

2. Live in the safeguard of prayer. "If," says the Psalmist, "I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me," but when iniquity is not regarded and the soul is uplifted to God in prayer, the evil of insincerity not only cannot enter, but is effectually displaced by that spirit of sincerity which is one of the essential features of a ministry of power and blessing. He is thereby united to Christ and is enabled to speak and live "in Christ," safe, secure, and satisfied in the exercise of his calling.

Section 2. Certitude (2 Cor. 1:19).

Among the charges laid against the Apostle was that of vacillation (see verses 15-20), and he replies and vindicates himself. But in so doing he characteristically goes much farther than a mere reference to himself. He brings in his Master and his message, and says that his message to them had not been unstable (verse 18), because it concerned the Son of God Who was by no means vacillating and unstable (verse 19). The text is abrupt and expressive of the Apostle's intense feeling, but the general meaning is clear. Weymouth's Version brings out the ideas very forcibly and suggestively.

"Did I display any vacillation or caprice in this? Or the purposes which I form - do I form them on worldly principles, now crying, 'Yes, yes,' and now, 'No, no'? As certainly as God is faithful, our language to you is not now 'Yes' and now 'No'. For Jesus Christ the Son of God - He Who was proclaimed among you by us, that is by Silas and Timothy and myself - did not show Himself a waverer between 'Yes' and 'No,' but it was and always is 'Yes' with Him."

This is man's deepest need, certitude. Carlyle's "Everlasting Yea" is expressive of an universal yearning.

I. Certitude in Christ.

The Gospel of Christ is "a mighty affirmation," it has no ambiguities.

1. There is the "Yea" of a Divine Assurance. The Gospel is the "Good News" of God's love. In the Person of His Son God's love is assured to the whole world. There is nothing hesitating or vacillating in this; it has all the power of a Divine fact.

2. There is the "Yea" of a Divine Welcome. God is ready to receive all who will respond to His love. His welcome is at once hearty and lasting, and nothing is more certain than the assurance that "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

3. There is the "Yea" of a Divine Security. One of the great foundation words of the Bible is the word "Covenant," as expressive of God's relations to man, and it is "an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure." This Covenant is expressed in the Atonement, the Blood of the new Covenant, and manifested in the grace of God. The Covenant of Grace is the great foundation fact which assures men of every security in Christ.

So that Christ is not an Uncertainty but a Certainty, not a mere Ideal, but a Redeemer, and this assurance is absolute, decisive, complete, and unchangeable.

II. Certitude in the Preacher.

If the message is certain surely the messenger ought to be, and can be.

"It is in this positive, definite, unmistakable character that the strength of the Gospel lies. What a man cannot know, cannot seize, cannot tell, he cannot preach." [Denney, The Expositor's Bible, 2 Corinthians, p. 41.]

1. The Need of Certitude is great and constant. The underlying thought is that life and character are determined by the interest that predominates in them, that occupation reacts on the spiritual life and fashions it. Paul's life was permeated and influenced by the Gospel he preached. As there was nothing shifting in that, so there was nothing shifty in him. Our message should be definite, positive, and unchanging. The unrest today has affected so many that as Dr. Forsyth has aptly said, instead of crying out, as of old "Here am I," they ask "Where am I?" "It must not be 'Yes' and 'Nay,' now one thing and now another, it must come from the deep convictions of one who can say 'I know.' If we do not know we cannot preach, for there is no real message apart from convictions, as people only too easily see and feel. Dr. Forsyth said some time ago:-

"The difficulty that caused most of the ills that afflicted them in their Churches at the present moment was not that men were wrong, but that they were in a cloud and did not know where they were. The thing most necessary and the thing they must lay their foundations on was that men should be turned out, not knowing a whole theology, but at least knowing the trend which theology should follow, and which would give them a foothold from which they would not be removed, however widely their vision might be enlarged."

2. The Elements of Certitude are obvious. We must preach a threefold Christ. Christ as a Saviour for Pardon; Christ as Sanctification for Power; Christ as Satisfaction for Peace. These are the deepest and most constant needs: Pardon, Power, Peace; and the man who proclaims them positively, definitely, and wholeheartedly will never lack hearers or blessing.

3. The Secret of Certitude is not far to seek. It means that our own soul should be at anchorage in union and communion with Christ. The anchorage of trust, relying on and receiving from Him. The anchorage of fellowship through prayer and the Bible. The anchorage of testimony, telling out our experience and thereby confirming it. If only we live in the abundant wealth of Scripture, we shall never have a poor or faltering message. Spirituality is our greatest guarantee of certitude, as secularity is our greatest foe. The man to whom Christ is real, vital, precious, is the man who speaks with unflinching tongue because he "knows Whom he has believed" (2 Tim. 1:12.)

Section 3. Limitations (2 Cor. 1:24).

The Apostle has been defending himself against the charge of fickleness, and here he digresses to say a word about his ministry. Denney says that, like Plato's, Paul's digressions are sometimes more attractive than arguments. He tells the Corinthians that it was to spare them he had not come, and that if he really wished to lord it over them he would have come sooner. And if after verse 23 they should be tempted to say, "And who, pray, is he who speaks like this?" the answer is given by anticipation in verse 24. "Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy." Like Peter, he would not "lord it over God's heritage" (1 Peter 5:3), and as he himself said to Roman Christians, he is just as ready to receive as to give a blessing (Rom. 1:11). So we have here St. Paul's plain statement about the limitations of a

spiritual ministry exercised through human agency.

I. What the Ministry is not.

"Not for that we have dominion over your faith."

1. The realm of personal faith is a realm between the soul and God into which the ministry cannot enter. A minister cannot create faith in God in another. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," and all the minister can do is to provide the materials and opportunity for faith by the proclamation of the Gospel. Nor can the minister compel or coerce faith. The most he can do is to persuade to it. Above all, the minister cannot kill faith. If faith dies, it will be by suicide, not by murder. What the minister can do is either to strengthen or to shake faith. He can confirm it, or cause it to waver. A serious position enough, but that is as far as he can go.

2. When this is realized it is at once evident that the minister is not a Director. We must beware lest the ministry ever becomes a Directorate of the soul. This is the esse of the Roman Catholic view of the ministry, and it can easily become the esse of many a Protestant ministry. But it is futile and fatal in both. In the Roman Catholic the Minister as a Director is really a source of spiritual weakness rather than of strength. It is not possible for any but the morbid to tell everything thoroughly to a human being. As someone says, speaking from personal experience: -

"Confession at the fullest is only partial, and the unconfessed sins vastly outnumber the confessed, leaving the very uncomfortable result of a work imperfectly done. The only escape for the sinner is in coming face to face with the Cross. It is just at this point where confession breaks down." [Cauldwell, The Cross in Dark Places, p. 110.]

And a Roman Catholic priest of wide experience not long ago said that during his many years of experience in the confessional he had never once received a confession of the sin of covetousness. And yet perhaps there is no sin so prevalent as covetousness in its various forms. The same thing is true of anything like a Protestant Ministerial Directorate. It weakens the individuality, tends to lead the soul to use the minister as a crutch, keeps the soul an invalid instead of sending it forth to walk in newness of life. Whether therefore in its Roman Catholic or in its Protestant form, "Clericalism is the enemy." We must carefully distinguish between ministerial direction and ministerial guidance. By all means let us teach, and lead, and guide, but never, never let us control. The ministry is a medium, not a mediation. Faith is a personal matter between the soul and God, and is intended to grow towards maturity; and grow it will, if it is not interfered with.

II. What the Ministry is.

"Helpers of your joy."

1. Helpers. What a fine, suggestive, and satisfying idea of ministry! Nothing could be more inspiring. A Helper. What more could man wish to be? Teaching with authority is not dictating to the conscience, or forcing your personality on another, or compelling another to reproduce you. A helper of others will endeavour to develop their personality and make them as far as possible independent of himself. It is sometimes charged against Theological Colleges that they tend to make men into machines, all of one pattern, echoes of their teachers, and unable to deviate from certain lines of action. I am not so sure from my own experience whether this is actually the case or not, but we can at least heed the warning and

follow the counsel given by the Lambeth Conference to Theological Colleges to encourage men to think for themselves and to form their own conclusions. We must beware of accepting without testing, of assimilating without verifying. We must collect facts, grasp principles, and then draw deductions for ourselves, and in proportion as we are thus truly individualistic ourselves we shall be "helpers" to our people to become the same.

2. But in particular we are to be "Helpers of Joy". Joy is the ideal of the Christian life. "Rejoice in the Lord always." Is this so today in ourselves and in our Churches? Pensiveness is not a New Testament note. Wistfulness finds no place in the Christian life of the New Testament. Joy is the supreme fact and factor of the Gospel of Christianity. The joy of Salvation, of Truth, of Holiness, of Fellowship, of Service, of Hope. "Joy unspeakable and full of glory." And it is the minister's duty to help this joy in every possible way. How? By possessing it himself, by preaching it, and by living it. There is nothing so inspiring, uplifting, strengthening as Christian joy. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." Suffering often hardens; joy never does. Suffering often saddens; joy always gladdens; and as "good news" is the essence of the Gospel, so "glad tidings" should be the substance of the preacher's message.

III. What the Ministry requires.

If this work is to be done two things are needed.

1. We must cultivate our own individuality. This is the fundamental requirement of all who would lead and guide their fellows. What a fine testimony Mr. Asquith gave to his old Head Master, Dr. Abbott, of the City of London School. After praising his scholarship and its effect on his pupils in "those stimulating and vivifying lessons," the Prime Minister said: -

"But, my old schoolfellows, behind and beyond all that there was something more. There was the force, the influence, the personality of a man cultured, disinterested, austere, but, at the same time, with a vivid interest in the affairs of mankind, and in everything that concerned the boys who came under his charge, I am perfectly certain there is not a full-grown man here who in those days - the days of the '60s and the '70s - was under Dr. Abbott's tuition and guidance who will not agree with me that the most precious possession we took away with us from the City of London School, whether to Oxford or Cambridge, or to the works of business and to the avocations of life, was the sense of that strong, self-sufficing, but, at the same time, widespread, vivifying, many-sided personality to which many of us have looked back in the stress and strain of life as the best example and the best influence."

So must it be with the true minister. His must be a wholehearted, manly personality if he is to instruct and inspire his people.

2. And the minister must also cultivate self-effacement. This is no contradiction of the foregoing, but the most perfect complement. Individuality and yet self-effacement, and the greater the personality the more thorough the self-effacement. We must ever guard against the danger of the strong will dominating the weak. We must ever watch against forgetfulness of our limitations. Like the Baptist, while we must take care to be a voice, that is, a real sound and not a mere echo, we must also take care to be only a voice, that is, the expression of a personality which is summed up in the words, "Not I, but Christ."

And the one secret of all this is to make Christ real in our own experiences. Only thereby shall we avoid the dangers and fulfill the duties of the ministry. If like the Baptist we say, "He must increase, but I must decrease," we shall find to our joy that souls will be helped and blessed by our ministry, led to Christ, kept

near to Him, growing up in Him, used by Him in His service and for His glory. And this is the end of all ministry.

Section 4. Responsibility (2 Cor. 2:14-15).

We have here a characteristic outburst of the Apostle. He had been narrating purely personal matters (verses 12-13), and especially his suspense through the absence of Titus. When he could bear it no longer he went forth to meet him in Macedonia. He met him and received a full account of Church matters at Corinth (ch. 7:5-6), but his heart is so full that he cannot stay to say anything further of these personal concerns. He bursts out into thanksgiving at the thought of his ministry. Let us ponder what he says.

I. The Splendour of the Ministry.

1. It was a Triumph. "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ." How are we to read this? With the A.V., "which always causeth us to triumph"? Or with the R.V., "which always leadeth us in triumph"? Etymological considerations alone would lead to the rendering of the R.V., especially in the light of the same word in Colossians 2:15. But the idea of the context is not that of God's triumph in Paul, but of Paul's triumph through the Gospel. The thought of Paul as a "conquered enemy" is not in the passage, and the word should probably be rendered quite generally as meaning to make a show, or spectacle, indicating glory not disgrace. [So that acute scholar, Dr. Field, in his Notes on the Translation of the New Testament (p. 181). Cf. Denney, 2 Corinthians (p. 86). Schmeidel, Bruce, St. Paul's Conception of Christianity (p. 79), and McClellan, Expositor, Series 6, vol. x. p. 192, are ample authorities for preferring the A.V.] Even those who, like Denney, adhere to the etymology, and render with the R.V., are compelled to admit "a certain air of irrelevance" in the interpretation (p. 87), and seem unable to give a satisfying meaning in the light of the context. And so without hesitation we retain the A.V., and render it so as to refer to Paul's own triumph in Christ. The Corinthians, or a section of them, had been bitterly opposing him and his Gospel, but the good tidings received from Titus showed that the devil had not been allowed to have the victory. God had enabled His servant to triumph in Christ, and this was his invariable experience, for "God always causeth us to triumph."

2. It was also a Testimony. "And maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place." Wherever he went God used him to reveal His will, His grace, His love, Himself. The "fragrance" of God was evidently everywhere through the Apostle's testimony. The triumph was granted for the sole purpose of making known the Gospel of Divine Grace. It was God's will that His Gospel should be victorious, and this was actually brought about by the instrumentality of the Apostle. Wherever he went the self-righteous, the despairing, the hardhearted, the indifferent were led to Christ, and to the knowledge and acceptance of His Gospel. This was the glory, the splendour of the ministry. So it is always, the triumph and testimony of the Gospel of Grace and Peace.

II. The Solemnity of the Ministry.

But there is another side to be noticed and emphasized. Although there were triumphs, there were also rejections of the Gospel. God does not compel assent and insist on adherence. And so, while in them that were being saved St. Paul could say that he was "a sweet savour of Christ to God," it is not at first easy to realize how he could say that he was the same "in them that were perishing." What can this mean? It should be carefully noted that in both cases the recipient of the fragrance is God, not man. "We are unto God." It is not that the sweet savour is received by the hearers of the Gospel of both classes, but that in both cases the incense ascends to God, the "sweet savour" of grace in one case and of justice in the

other. It means that God is glorified in the saved and vindicated in the lost, and that if a minister does his duty, God regards his work with satisfaction whatever be the outcome. Even if there are no results God is pleased with a faithful ministry. How solemn and searching this is, no words are needed to point out.

III. The Satisfaction of the Ministry. 1. The Apostle's outburst of thanksgiving shows that his heart rejoiced at the results of the ministry. To be "a fragrance of Christ," and that "to God," was the highest possible joy of his life, and he could not but express his joy in thankfulness. Wherever he went he had more or less of success, but beyond this, in all cases, among saved and perishing alike, a fragrance of Christ was ever ascending to God, though not of the same nature; and it was in this view of all the consequences that the Apostle breaks forth in a strain of praise. 2.

But he was not unconscious of the awful seriousness of the other side. His ministry was "a savour of death unto death" to those who were unwilling to receive Christ, and that the Apostle keenly felt this is evident from his concluding words, "Who is sufficient for these things?" The minister has to realize and preach these alternatives; the greater the mercy, the greater the condemnation. Susceptibility decreases in proportion to resistance, and moral sufficiency increases as men become conscious of opportunities lost.

"It remains finally inexplicable that the Gospel, which appeals to some with winning irresistible power, subduing and leading them in triumph, should excite in others a passion of antipathy which nothing else could provoke. This remains inexplicable, because it is irrational. Nothing that can be pointed to in the universe is the least like a bad heart closing itself against the love of Christ, like a bad man's will stiffening into absolute rigidity against the will of God. The preaching of the Gospel may be the occasion of such awful results, but it is not their cause. ...

When we match our self-will against the gracious saving will of God, our pride, our passions, our mere sloth, against the soul-constraining love of Christ; when we prevail in the war which God's mercy wages with our wickedness - then the Gospel itself may be said to have ministered to our ruin; it was ordained to life, and we have made it a sentence of death. Yet even so, it is the joy and glory of God; it is a sweet savour to Him, fragrant of Christ and His love." [Denney, *The Expositor's Bible*, 2 Corinthians, p. 94.]

And so there are only two classes of men, and the ministry is either the cause of good, or the occasion of evil. If men are saved, it is by Divine Grace. If they are lost, it is by their own sin and in spite of Divine Grace. The Gospel becomes hidden from those who are unwilling to look at it (ch. 4:3 f). "But now they are hid from thine eyes" (Luke 19:42). It is God's will for all to be saved, but He never compels, and if men "will not come," they cannot receive and enjoy the blessings He has prepared in Christ for them.

The Gospel in itself is good, and nothing but good, but it has the most diverse effects among men. The same sun that melts ice hardens clay, and the Gospel, while accepted by some is rejected by others, and becomes "death unto death" to those who set themselves to reject it. God is not mocked, and whether in salvation or rejection He will be vindicated and His servants justified. Well may St. Paul cry out, "Who is sufficient for these things?" The Christian ministry is not to be taken up lightly, or prosecuted without the profoundest thought, the deepest feeling, and the tenderest sympathies for the wandering, the lost, and the perishing.

Section 5. Aspects (2 Cor. 2:17. 4:5, 5:11, 5:20).

The ministry, as exercised by St. Paul, had several aspects according to the work required, and the various words used by him to describe what he did are full of suggestion for the ministry today.

I. Speaking (2:17).

1. The message was God's Word and nothing else. A word from God. And to be delivered intact, unadulterated. And to be declared "as of sincerity", "as of God," "in the sight of God", "in Christ"!

2. The manner of delivery was simply "speaking"; natural, ordinary conversation, talking. "Talk ye of all His wondrous works" (1 Chron. 16:9). "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Psa. 107:2). The earliest extension of Christianity to the Gentiles went along this natural line. Certain men came to Antioch and "spoke" to the Greeks (Acts 11:20). We should cultivate this ordinary, natural way of declaring God's truth. While there is of course necessary and ample place for the more set and elaborate discourse, there is equal call, perhaps a greater call, for simple, natural testimony to God and His Word in our ordinary speech. Our message should not be far away at any time, with perfect naturalness we should be ready to give it in ordinary speech and conversation.

II. Heralding (4:5).

1. The Manner here is noteworthy. "We herald." This is an important aspect of the Christian ministry. There is no "bated breath and whispered humbleness" about the announcement of a herald. The attitude and tone indicate confidence and fearlessness. He knows his Master, his Master's position, authority, and power, and he declares his message accordingly. What an illustration of the Christian minister as he declares his message.

2. The Message. "We herald not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." Not ourselves, but Him. Observe the force of the three titles: Christ, Jesus, Lord. His threefold relation (a) to God (Christ), (b) to the sinner (Jesus), (c) to the believer (Lord). This is the substance of our message; the proclamation of a personal, Divine, redeeming Lord. Not ourselves, but Him. A friend of mine, himself a notable preacher, went once to hear two very great preachers, and when I asked him his impressions, he said, "In the one case I could not see the man for the Master. In the other I could not see the Master for the man." "Not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." And yet, "ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus." "Not I, but Christ, be honoured, loved, exalted." This is a theme worthy of all the heralding we can give to it.

III. Persuading (5:11).

1. The method is to be carefully noted. "We persuade." We impel, though we cannot compel. Persuasion is the one element of Christian preaching which keeps a sermon from being a mere essay. The truth is to be applied and acted on, not merely to be placed before people. It is for acceptance as well as consideration. We do not simply preach before men, we preach to them with a view to immediate and definite action. No sermon is worthy of the name that does not contain this essential element of persuasion.

2. The reason of such a method is seen in the Apostle's words. "Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord." It is this element of fear that constitutes the supreme reason for persuasion. Fear is a note far too seldom heard today in preaching and teaching. By an apparently inevitable rebound we have gone to the other extreme of dwelling on the element of love to the omission of fear. But we must find room for both if we would be true to the New Testament revelation. Modern teaching about the universal Fatherhood of God tends to rob the Gospel of its solemn and even severe element. God is regarded as a benign, gentle Father, Who will not be too severe with His wayward children. But the New Testament idea of Fatherhood

always includes the elements of righteousness and fear. "If ye call on the Father, Who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17). It is a serious and fatal error to omit the note of fear from our preaching. There is reason for Dr. Dale's remark to a friend: "No one fears God nowadays." But there are signs of return to a better mind. Men are finding out that the moral and spiritual results of preaching love and avoiding fear are not satisfactory, and as a consequence the old note of fear is coming once again into the messages. A well-known Cambridge scholar, Dr. Bethune Baker, has voiced this need in a little work in which he pleads for the return of the element of fear in preaching.

"We have almost ceased to teach what has been called 'the Gospel of Fear'. ... We have quietly dropped the word "damned" altogether. A new school of theology arose that made the Incarnation and the Love of God the Gospel, in place of the Atonement and the Fear of God. ... But surely the reaction has gone too far. ... And surely the Love of God - the Everlasting Arms ever open to receive His children - is not the whole of the Gospel. ... But did He not also hate evil, were He not wounded by every failure and lapse of His child, were He not also Judge to 'make inquisition for sin' - the less were He Love and Father. We must preach this part of the Gospel too. Welcome always awaiting the prodigal, but he must set his face homewards first. Healing for every transgression, but we must first turn away from it unto the Lord." [The Old Faith and the New Learning, pp. 48-51.]

IV. Representing (5:20). 1. The Christian minister is an ambassador on behalf of Christ, and his message as such is noteworthy and striking. It is nothing less than the announcement that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," and that based on this, it is the work of the minister to beseech men to be reconciled to God (verse 21). This is the very heart of the Christian Gospel, the message of Reconciliation. Estrangement in St.

Paul's teaching is two-sided, not one-sided only (Denney, p. 211). Something in God as well as in man had to be dealt with if there was to be reconciliation, and it is this "something" which constitutes the center and core of the Christian message. "'Reconciliation' in the New Testament sense is not something which we accomplish when we lay aside our enmity to God. It is something which God accomplished when in the death of Christ He put away everything that on His side meant estrangement, so that He might come and preach peace." [Denney, The Expositor's Bible, 2 Corinthians, p. 212.]

Canon Simpson well says that "Luther was only stating in the form of a brilliant paradox the very essence of the Pauline doctrine of Justification when he exclaimed, Ego sum tuum peccatum, tu es justitia mea. [Simpson, Fact and Faith, p. 57.] The fuller quotation from the great Reformer is worthy of reproduction: - "Thou, Lord Jesus Christ, art my Righteousness, I am Thy sin. Thou hast taken what was mine, and hast given me what was Thine. What Thou wast not Thou dost become, that I might become what I was not."

And this is preeminently the message of the Gospel. "When St. Paul says that God has given him the ministry of reconciliation, he means that he is a preacher of this peace. He ministers reconciliation to the world. His work has no doubt a hortatory side, as we shall see, but that side is secondary. It is not the main part of his vocation to tell men to make their peace with God, but to tell them that God has made peace with the world. At bottom, the Gospel is not good advice, but good news.

All the good advice it gives is summed up in this - Receive the good news. But if the good news be taken away, if we cannot say God has made peace, God has dealt seriously with His condemnation of sin, so that it no longer stands in the way of your return to Him. If we cannot say, Here is the reconciliation,

receive it, then for man's actual state we have no Gospel at all." [Denney, The Expositor's Bible, 2 Corinthians, p. 213.] The man who knows this by blessed, personal experience is the man who alone can properly perform the functions of an ambassador for Christ. 2.

But the methods of the ambassador must not be overlooked. "As though God were entreating you by us; we beseech" (verse 20). "And ... we entreat you also" (ch. 6:1). The ambassador "exhorting" and "beseeching" is a striking contrast. He comes in his Master's Name and begs the acceptance of the Divine reconciliation. "Most expositors notice the amazing contrast between $\pi\rho\epsilon\sigma\beta\epsilon\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu$ ("we are ambassadors") and $\delta\epsilon\mu\epsilon\theta\alpha$ ("we beseech you"). The ambassador, as a rule, stands upon his dignity.

He maintains the greatness of the person whom he represents. But Paul in this lowly passionate entreaty is not false to his Master. He is preaching the Gospel in the spirit of the Gospel. He shows that he has really learned of Christ. The very conception of the ambassador descending to entreaty is, as Calvin says, an incomparable commendation of the grace of Christ ... in his dignity as Christ's ambassador and as the mouthpiece of God, in his humility, in his passionate earnestness, in the urgency and directness of his appeal, St.

Paul is the supreme type and example of the Christian minister." [Denney, The Expositor's Bible, 2 Corinthians, p. 216.] As we review these four aspects of the Christian ministry, do we not see something of its greatness, its grandeur, its intensity, its applicability? Be it ours to enter into these elements and realize them in our service in the power of the Spirit of God.

Section 6. The Foundation (2 Cor. 6:3 f.).

The highest aspect of the Christian minister is that of an ambassador with the ministry of reconciliation (ch. 5:19-21). The chief requirement of the minister is character, and without this all ideas of office or work go for naught.

I. The Possible Evil.

1. The minister must not give any occasion of stumbling, lest the ministry be blamed. Our Lord laid great stress on the possibility and danger of occasions of stumbling ($\sigma\kappa\alpha\nu\delta\omicron\lambda\alpha$), and of the consequent need of watchful caution. The application of this to the ministry is particularly pressing, for some people seem to be only too ready to use anything as an excuse against a clergyman.

2. This danger may take various forms. A minister may be marked by ignorance and shallowness while occupied with the highest possible themes. He may be full of conceit and pride while proclaiming humility. He may be actuated by worldliness and self-advantage while warning against ambition. He may be dominated by indolence and ease while urging self-sacrifice. He may be influenced by selfishness and avarice while extolling liberality. He may be guilty of unspirituality while insisting on the highest spirituality. There is no greater danger, no more serious peril, than that of a gulf between word and deed, between message and character, between preaching and practice.

3. This peril comes to the minister by various channels, as to which he needs to be on guard. Sometimes it is due to bodily strain. The pressure upon body and nerves leads to a breakdown which reflects on consistency and character. At other times the intellectual demands of the ministry may lead to the same sad result. The pressure upon his intellectual life to provide material for his people may easily lead him to forget the application to himself. He may preach an ideal which he not only does not realize, but shows no

sign of doing so. And he will fail to "lure to brighter worlds" unless he himself "leads the way". Again, trying circumstances may lead to failure in Christian living. People are exacting, irritating, annoying, and in his impatience he gives way to some outbreak of peevishness, or perhaps even of temper, which at once spoils his ministry and leads people to reflect on the difference between his preaching and his practice. And so, whatever be the cause, we lose by our life what we say by our lips, and the ministry is blamed because we have given occasion of stumbling.

II. The Definite Duty.

1. We must "commend" the ministry by our life (verse 4). "In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God." In chapter 4:2, St. Paul had spoken similarly of "commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." There is no contradiction here to the apparent contrasts in chapter 3:1 and chapter 5:12, where he deprecates "commending himself," for the motive and purpose of the "commendation" are quite different. The minister commends himself as a minister, as a servant of God, and as representing his Master.

2. But how is this to be done? St. Paul tells us of several ways.

(a) Sometimes it will be by suffering (verses 4-5).

(b) Sometimes it will be by doing (verses 6-8a).

(c) Sometimes it will be by being (verses 8b-10).

It is far easier to record and recount these various methods of commending the ministry than to reproduce them in natural life, and yet this is the ideal to be aimed at, and by the grace of God realized.

III. The Simple Secret.

How is this life to be lived? That is the supreme question for all ministers.

1. The first point to be remembered is that conduct is only truly based on character, and life can only be lived aright if it is the expression of what we are. No emphasis can be too great on ministerial character. We are too apt to think of ministerial reputation, but this is always erroneous and may prove disastrous. Let a man take care of his character, and God will take care of his reputation. Never a thought need be given to reputation, which will be all that is essential if only our character is right with God.

2. And character in turn is based on communion with God. Faithfulness springs from fellowship, and the man who stands right with man is he who keeps right with God. Communion with God purifies, clarifies, solidifies the inner life and makes the man what he should be. And this communion is only possible through prayer and the Bible. In prayer we commune with God; in the Bible He communes with us. The two together provide all that we need for the protection, sanctification, and consecration of daily living. As with Joshua of old, the man who makes God's Word his daily meditation will find his way prosperous and will have good success.

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