

“I can think of no better mentor from church history for pastors today than Charles Haddon Spurgeon. In his high view of ministry, love for God’s Word, commitment to the church, and countless other areas, he is a model of zeal, faithfulness, and perseverance. In this book, Alex has collected some of Spurgeon’s best teaching on pastoral ministry. Put it to work and introduce the next generation of pastors to a mentor they can learn from for the rest of their lives.”

Geoff Chang

Assistant Professor of Historical Theology, and Curator of the Spurgeon Library, MBTS; Author, *Spurgeon, the Pastor: Recovering a Biblical and Theological Vision for Ministry*.

“Pastor and Spurgeon scholar Alex DiPrima has served pastors and seminary professors, by putting together ten choice lectures by Charles Haddon Spurgeon from his classic works, *Lectures to My Students* and *An All Around Ministry*. The new formatting, helpful footnotes, and introduction to each lecture, gives pastors, professors, and mentors a tool to train the next generation for faithful gospel ministry. DiPrima’s introduction to the book will inspire pastors seeking to mentor men for ministry. I’ll be recommending *Servants of Christ, Lovers of Men* as a go-to book for pastoral training.”

Phil Newton

Director of Pastoral Care & Mentoring, Pillar Network; Visiting Professor of Pastoral Theology, SWBTS; Author, *40 Questions about Pastoral Ministry* and *Shepherding the Pastor*.

“A ring’s setting does not enhance the beauty of a diamond. Rather, it ensures its beauty is visible. *Servants of Christ, Lovers of Men* does the same with selected works from Charles Spurgeon. This fresh look at some of the Prince of Preacher’s most helpful pastoral training materials will bless generation to come.”

Garrett Kell

Pastor of Del Ray Baptist Church, Alexandria, VA;
Author, *Pure in Heart: Sexual Sin and the Promises of God*

“DiPrima mines gold from the Spurgeon treasury and packages it uniquely in *Servants of Christ, Lovers of Men*. This book is unique because of its brilliant preface, “The Pastor’s Pastor,” the contextual essays leading each chapter, and numerous citations of sources that Spurgeon marshalled, many from the 19th century. The result? You will feel like you are beside Spurgeon in his study as he prepares these addresses and seated before him in his classroom as he delivers them. Excellent!”

Ray Rhodes

Pastor of Grace Community Church in Dawsonville, GA; Author, *Susie: The Life and Legacy of Susannah Spurgeon* and *Yours, Till Heaven: The Untold Love Story of Charles and Susie Spurgeon*

“With a judicious selection of Charles Spurgeon’s counsels to his fellow-pastors and preachers, thoughtfully introduced, Alex DiPrima brings the wisdom and experience of that gifted minister within our reach. For those unaware of Spurgeon’s output in this sphere, or daunted by its size and weight, this collection serves either as a taster or a refresher, offering to modern ministers the most widely-applicable and enduringly-relevant of Spurgeon’s pastoral guidance. Reading these lectures will not bestow upon you Spurgeon’s gifts, but should stir the same graces which he received and enjoyed, and help make your heart happy and your labour lively.”

Jeremy Walker

Pastor of Maidenbower Baptist Church, Crawley;
Host, *From the Heart of Spurgeon* podcast

“Reading Charles Spurgeon is always enjoyable and always edifying. This selection of Spurgeon’s addresses on pastoral ministry serves up both in heaps. Whether you’re a pastor or aspire to be one, I heartily recommend that you let Spurgeon pastor you, and teach you something of how to train pastors, by reading this book. If you’re anything like me, you’ll have a hard time putting it down.”

Bobby Jamieson

Associate Pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC;
Author, *The Path to Being a Pastor: A Guide for the Aspiring*

Servants of Christ, Lovers of Men

ALEX DIPRIMA

SERVANTS OF CHRIST, LOVERS OF MEN

Spurgeon on Pastoral Ministry



Servants of God, Lovers of Men

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The Pastor's Pastor

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–92) loved pastoral ministry. He loved being a pastor himself, and he loved training, befriending, and supporting other pastors in their ministries. He taught regularly on pastoral theology and wrote books full of practical wisdom and guidance for pastors. His grandfather, his father, his brother, and his two sons were all pastors. His wife, Susie, founded a book fund for poor pastors. Simply put, pastoral work shaped Spurgeon's life, his thought, and his closest relationships.

In 1851, when he was only seventeen years old, Spurgeon took his first pastorate in the village of Waterbeach, just outside of Cambridge. Once he accepted this call to pastor, the course of his life was set. When faced with the prospect of pursuing a college degree that would've required him to leave his congregation, he declined, considering the idea of separation from his flock to be intolerable.¹ Only a call to shepherd another congregation in the heart of the world's largest city could induce him to remove. In 1854, he accepted the call to pastor one of London's most historic Baptist churches, then called New Park Street Chapel. It would later change its name under Spurgeon's ministry to the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Spurgeon shepherded this congregation for nearly four decades until his death in 1892. In that time, he would see the membership of the church grow from 232 to 5,311.²

In 1857, just a few years into his London ministry, Spurgeon founded what came to be known as the Pastors' College, which

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records by His Wife and his Private Secretary*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897), 242.

² Figures recorded in the annual membership roles in the archives of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

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was a two-year training institution for pastors. Spurgeon's work in training ministers through the College was profoundly fruitful by any measure. By 1871, graduates of the Pastors' College accounted for ten percent of all Baptist ministers in England and Wales. By Spurgeon's death in 1892, that number had risen to over twenty percent.³ During his thirty-five years as College President, Spurgeon trained 863 men for the ministry and helped to plant nearly 200 new churches in Britain alone.⁴ It has been estimated that between 1865 and 1887 Spurgeon and his students founded over half of the new Baptist churches in England.⁵

The Pastors' College had three main requirements for admission. First, Spurgeon expected all incoming students to show evidence of true piety and holiness before God. Second, they were required to demonstrate a proven track record in preaching and soul-winning. With only rare exceptions, Spurgeon expected applicants to have at least two years of preaching experience if they were to be admitted. The third requirement was instances of proven usefulness in Christian work. Spurgeon said, "We want soldiers, not fops, earnest labourers, not genteel loiterers. Men who have done nothing up to their time of application to the college, are told to earn their spurs before they are publicly dubbed as knights."⁶

But if these requirements seemed great, from another angle the College's admission standards were set rather low. To start, the College required no pre-requisites in terms of education, not even the ability to read. All were welcome regardless of one's

³ Kenneth D. Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales 1800–1930* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1988), 33–34, 98.

⁴ D. W. Bebbington, "Spurgeon and British Evangelical Theological Education," in D. G. Hart and R. A. Mohler, Jr., eds., *Theological Education in the Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 221; Peter J. Morden, *C. H. Spurgeon: The People's Preacher* (Farnham, UK: CWR, 2009), 151.

⁵ Morden, *C. H. Spurgeon: The People's Preacher*, 151.

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, First Series (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1881), 34.

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educational background. Furthermore, with only rare exception, the education offered at the College was provided entirely free of charge. More than that, Spurgeon saw to it that basic needs like housing, clothing, books, basic health care, and even pocket money were provided for the students.⁷ Spurgeon determined from the outset that educational and financial disadvantages would not hinder men from entering the College.⁸

All of these standards, taken together, attracted exactly the sort of men Spurgeon was after — common men from the ordinary ranks of society who were marked by godliness of character, evident preaching ability, and a readiness to give their all in service to Christ and his church. To such men, Spurgeon was utterly devoted. He gave his best energies to training, supporting, and sending them all over England and the world.

Spurgeon's classic work, *Lectures to My Students*,⁹ stands as a lasting testament to his passion for training pastors. These lectures were delivered to the students of the Pastors' College and later compiled for publication. It was Spurgeon's custom, when able, to deliver an extemporaneous lecture on Friday afternoon to the assembled student body of the College. The focus of these lectures was on pastoral theology and practical pastoral issues. They embody Spurgeon's ideals for pastoral ministry, and focus on spiritual devotion, preaching, and practical leadership.

Spurgeon's love and care for the pastors he trained did not end once they graduated. He continued to keep in touch with them, pray for them, and provide counsel and support for them. He developed a robust network of pastors that convened annually at what was known as the College Conference, an invite-only

⁷ Arnold Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1985), 105.

⁸ Bebbington, "Spurgeon and British Evangelical Theological Education," 224–228.

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 3 vols. (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1881–1894).

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gathering of current and former students of the Pastors' College. The conference usually spanned three or four days and included reports from men who had gone out from the College, addresses by various pastors and leaders within the group, and special times for prayer and fellowship among the men. It was Spurgeon's task as President of the College Conference to bring the annual President's address. He regarded these conferences as the highlight of the year, and he put considerable effort into preparation for his annual message. A few years after his death, some of his most memorable addresses were collected into a volume titled, *An All-Round Ministry*,¹⁰ which is still in print today.

Spurgeon for today

My interest in preparing the volume in hand stems in no small part from my own background and experience with Charles Spurgeon. I grew up among Christians who revered and admired Spurgeon, and viewed themselves self-consciously as continuing in his theological tradition. Throughout my upbringing, Spurgeon was often quoted, his books were recommended, and his ministry was celebrated. When, in my teenage years, I first expressed my aspirations to pursue pastoral ministry, I was immediately encouraged to read *Lectures to My Students*, which I did several times.

While in seminary, I began to read Spurgeon's sermons and to study more of his biography. I found myself increasingly drawn to Spurgeon for his emphasis on the person and work of Christ, his understanding of the vital importance of doctrine, and his bright and joy-filled outlook on the Christian life, the mission of the church, and the hope of heaven. His vision for theology, ministry, and church life deeply resonated with me. I knew I had found my man.

¹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry: Addresses to Ministers and Students* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1900).

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When the idea of pursuing doctoral studies was first introduced to me, I was certain who I wanted to study. Spurgeon's influence on my life had already been massive, and I longed to know more about him and to understand him in greater depth. The next five years which I spent studying Spurgeon were a welcome delight and challenge that shaped me in manifold ways.

As part of my doctoral work, I gave considerable attention to Spurgeon's many benevolent institutions, including Spurgeon's work through the Pastors' College. I came to appreciate, as I hadn't before, how unique Spurgeon's perspectives on pastoral ministry were in his own day. He was self-consciously aware that he was pioneering an approach to theological training that, if it ever existed in England, had fallen out of fashion among the upper classes and educated elite. His distinctive approach to pastoral training would focus on Calvinist and Puritan theology, experimental piety, Christ-centered preaching, and energetic pastoral leadership.

As I eventually entered pastoral ministry myself, I found Spurgeon's perspectives uniquely helpful and tremendously relevant to my own ministry. I found his writings on the ministry unmatched for their flare, insight, and relevance. As a young pastor I felt understood, supported, and challenged by Spurgeon. Eagerly, I recommended *Lectures to My Students* to other pastors and men aspiring to the ministry. I quickly found that I was not alone in experiencing great personal benefit from Spurgeon's writings on the pastoral ministry.

As I was studying Spurgeon both as a scholar and a pastor, I began to see the potential value of compiling an edited volume of Spurgeon's best lectures and addresses on pastoral ministry. Such a volume, I believed, could accomplish two purposes. First, it could make Spurgeon's best thoughts on pastoral ministry more easily accessible and readable for a new generation of pastors. Second, such a volume could serve as an introduction to Spurgeon's

perspectives and could provoke further study of his material on the ministry.

I am pleased that this project has now come to fruition in the present volume. Spurgeon's perspectives on the ministry, contained in this collection of lectures and addresses, are as relevant today as they were in the nineteenth century. Here is wisdom for the busy pastor navigating the diverse challenges of the ministry. Here is encouragement for the preacher seeking to proclaim Christ faithfully to his flock week by week. Here is comfort and support for the weary minister overwhelmed by the troubles and trials of pastoral work. Here is help for pastors.

The lectures and addresses

The first eight addresses in this collection are taken from *Lectures to My Students*, which has been a classic among pastors since it first appeared in the 1870s. *Lectures to My Students* was originally published in three volumes. The first two volumes include lectures on a variety of pastoral subjects. The third volume is almost entirely devoted to the use of illustrations and anecdotes in preaching. Most of the modern unabridged editions bundle the first three volumes together into one book, and sometimes include as a fourth volume Spurgeon's *Commenting and Commentaries*, which includes his thoughts about the utility of commentaries in general as well as a running catalogue of various commentaries with Spurgeon's comments on their relative quality (or lack thereof).

All of the lectures I have selected from *Lectures to My Students* are drawn from the first two volumes, as I consider these volumes to contain the content that is most timeless and relevant to pastors today. Choosing which lectures should be included in the present collection was exceedingly difficult. Several excellent lectures were left on the threshing floor. Chief among them were the lectures titled, "Attention," "The Holy Spirit in Connection with

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Our Ministry,” and “On Conversion as Our Aim.” I am resigned to content myself with the hope that what I have prepared in this edited collection will serve as an introduction to the unabridged edition of *Lectures to My Students*. This volume will have failed in its aim if it does not stimulate readers to explore that larger collection of Spurgeon's lectures.

The final two addresses of this book are taken from *An All-Round Ministry*, which contains twelve messages delivered by Spurgeon at the Annual College Conference. The various addresses that Spurgeon delivered at the College Conference took up a host of different topics, and usually came in the form of a pastoral charge, an impassioned exhortation, or a rallying cry of sorts for the men who gathered together for the conference. This tremendous resource is full of leadership lessons, pastoral insights, and timeless counsel that showcase Spurgeon's wisdom and breadth of perspective on the privileges and challenges of pastoral leadership. A mere two chapters in the book in hand can only serve as a sneak preview of what the full volume has to offer pastors today.

Lectures to My Students and *An All-Round Ministry* together represent the fullest collection of Spurgeon's pastoral wisdom. They provide a pastoral smorgasbord of practical counsel and insight for the hungry pastor. The present volume serves as an introduction and primer to those larger works and endeavors to capture, in more compact form, something of their force and brilliance.

Method of selection

My particular selection of the addresses that form the ten chapters of this book were based on three main factors. First, quite simply, I went for the best of Spurgeon's lectures and addresses. Even among those who have not read much of Spurgeon, many are nonetheless aware of his classic lectures, “The Call to the

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Ministry” or “The Minister’s Fainting Fits.” Some addresses like these simply had to be included because they are among Spurgeon’s best and most well-known material.

Second, I have selected addresses that I believe best represent the man himself and the central burdens that motivated him. My instincts in this respect have led me to select lectures and addresses that are taken up with matters of piety, preaching, and pastoral leadership. My own opinion is that these concerns dominated Spurgeon’s thinking when it came to pastoral ministry. The ideal minister in Spurgeon’s mind was a man who truly walked with God, evinced an evident preaching gift, and possessed the leadership qualities necessary to guide the people of God in their mission and ministry.

The third factor governing my selection was my sense of the relevance of the various addresses to pastors today. The reality is, not all of Spurgeon’s material is still relevant. *Lectures to My Students*, for example, contains lectures such as “On the Voice,” which assumes a context without modern audio amplification technology, and “The Workers with Slender Apparatus,” which refers to pastors without access to quality books—hardly an issue for anyone today who has access to the internet. There are also chapters in the third volume on illustrations and anecdotes that may not connect as well with contemporary audiences. However, the lectures and addresses I have selected for this collection are evergreen, and will be relevant to pastors until Christ returns.

Alterations and expansions of the text

On the whole, I have endeavored to leave the text of the various lectures and addresses essentially unaltered. To my knowledge, I have not deleted a single word, and have only made minor alterations to the grammar of the original text in order to make it more readable for contemporary audiences. Spurgeon’s writing sometimes includes what would today be regarded as run-on sentences,

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as well as the overuse of semi-colons, colons, and exclamation points. These aspects of his style were commonplace in the writing of the Victorians, but would be considered somewhat cumbersome by today's standards.

In general, Spurgeon's writing was considered delightfully fresh and engaging by his readers, especially in comparison to the tiresome and pedantic style that prevailed among many ministers in his day. Even today, the lectures and addresses read quite well. Any who wish to speak and write in a manner that will be appreciated beyond one's lifetime would do well to imitate Spurgeon's simplicity and ease of expression, his muscular vocabulary, and his healthy use of illustrations, metaphors, and anecdotes.

I have included footnotes for all of Spurgeon's quotations in the various addresses, which are almost wholly lacking in the original text. I have endeavored to identify the author (with dates), the title of the work cited, and, when possible, bibliographical information from a nineteenth century edition of the work that perhaps Spurgeon himself may have used. I have also included footnotes for references to particular historical figures, events, and literary characters. Additionally, I have included my own section headings for greater ease in reading.

I introduce each address with a brief essay that either provides historical context, a summary of the address's main points, or my own personal and pastoral observations concerning the subject at hand. These short introductions are only given as an appetizer to the larger entree. If they do not accomplish that aim, feel free to skip them on your way to the main course!

An invitation to learn and grow

I close with a personal invitation. I invite you to take *your* seat in the Pastors' College and learn from this faithful and proven minister. I believe he has something to say that pastors today dearly need to hear. In these lectures and addresses, Spurgeon comes

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alongside us in the ministry, and pastors the pastors. He invites us to pursue progress in our ministries, and he shows us the way forward. He reminds us that there is always room to grow and improve in service to Christ, and that the Lord is worthy of our greatest efforts and our most zealous devotion. Spurgeon holds out the hope to us that we can experience more of Christ in our ministries and more of the Spirit's help in pastoral work. He holds forth a vision for pastoral ministry that is bright with holiness, strong in conviction, and full of spiritual power. There is something in these pages for pastors who wish to know better what it means to shepherd the flock, for ministers who long to be renewed in their service to Christ and his church, and for men who want to experience more of the Spirit's power in preaching. All of this and more you will find in these chapters.

1

The Minister's Self-Watch

Introduction

In this seminal lecture, Spurgeon addresses the vital importance of the minister's own self-examination with respect to his life and ministry. The first half of the lecture focuses on the need for ministers to ensure that they themselves are truly converted, and also enumerates some of the disastrous effects of an unconverted ministry. In Spurgeon's day, it was not uncommon for men to enter the ministry simply because it was seen as a respectable profession. This was particularly the case in the state church. Thus, it was not at all unusual to come across men in the ministry who had never experienced the new birth themselves. Of course, to Spurgeon, it was deplorable for any man to enter upon a pastoral call without having first been savingly united to Christ. In the first part of this address, he makes this point emphatically.

In the second half of the lecture, Spurgeon develops the importance of true piety and godly character among ministers. In the Pastors' College, the cultivation of vital godliness was one of the requirements for admission. Spurgeon would not accept students who reflected "a low state of piety, a want of enthusiasm, a failure in private devotion, a lack of consecration."¹ In an 1866 article in *The Sword and the Trowel*, Spurgeon listed piety as the first of the College's admission standards, writing, "The selection of candidates for admission is principally determined by evidences of

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, ed., *The Sword and the Trowel* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, June, 1889), 311.

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eminent piety, of adaptation to public teaching, of great zeal for the salvation of souls, and of instances of actual usefulness.”²

When it comes to pastoral ministry, it could be said, character is king. To a generation that is too easily impressed with charisma, professional competence, and personal magnetism, Spurgeon’s call for ministers to nurture spiritual vigor and a close walk with God ought to come with fresh force. Churches should desire more in their pastors than personal charm and slick presentation. Too many are willing to wink at men who are lax with respect to piety, as long as they are urbane, competent, and able to keep the machinery of the church in good working order. However, Spurgeon reminds us that true pastors must be those who walk with God and evidence the fruit of a secret history with Him in the way they live and minister.

Furthermore, in a context in which many men have disqualified themselves or become enshrouded in scandal and controversy, Spurgeon’s emphasis on godly character in pastors should invite our heartiest approval. Only men of true godliness and eminent holiness are qualified to serve the church as her leaders. The qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are not negotiable. They are given as filters through which every ministerial candidate must pass. Spurgeon reminds us that the church must insist on Christ-likeness in her ministers in order to preserve the witness of the church, provide an example to the flock, and lead God’s people in their mission

² Spurgeon, *The Sword and the Trowel* (March, 1866), 135.

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Every workman knows the necessity of keeping his tools in a good state of repair, for “if the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength.” If the workman lose the edge from his adze, he knows that there will be a greater draught upon his energies, or his work will be badly done. Michael Angelo,¹ the elect of the fine arts, understood so well the importance of his tools, that he always made his own brushes with his own hands, and in this he gives us an illustration of the God of grace, who with special care fashions for himself all true ministers. It is true that the Lord, like Quintin Mastys² in the story of the Antwerp well-cover, can work with the faultiest kind of instrumentality, as he does when he occasionally makes very foolish preaching to be useful in conversion; and he can even work without agents, as he does when he saves men without a preacher at all, applying the word directly by his Holy Spirit; but we cannot regard God’s absolutely sovereign acts as a rule for our action. He may, in his own absoluteness, do as pleases him best, but we must act as his plainer dispensations instruct us; and one of the facts which is clear enough is this, that the Lord usually adapts means to ends, from which the plain lesson is, that we shall be likely to accomplish most when we are in the best spiritual condition; or in other words, we shall usually do our Lord’s work best when our gifts and graces are in good order, and we shall do worst when they are most out of trim. This is a practical truth for our guidance, when the Lord makes exceptions, they do but prove the rule.

¹ Michelangelo (1475–1564) was a renowned Italian painter, sculptor, and architect.

² Quinten Matsys (1466–1530) was a well-known Flemish painter.

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We are, in a certain sense, our own tools, and therefore must keep ourselves in order. If I want to preach the gospel, I can only use my own voice; therefore I must train my vocal powers. I can only think with my own brains, and feel with my own heart, and therefore I must educate my intellectual and emotional faculties. I can only weep and agonise for souls in my own renewed nature, therefore must I watchfully maintain the tenderness which was in Christ Jesus. It will be in vain for me to stock my library, or organise societies, or project schemes, if I neglect the culture of myself; for books, and agencies, and systems, are only remotely the instruments of my holy calling; my own spirit, soul, and body, are my nearest machinery for sacred service; my spiritual faculties, and my inner life, are my battle axe and weapons of war. M'Cheyne,³ writing to a ministerial friend, who was travelling with a view to perfecting himself in the German tongue, used language identical with our own,

I know you will apply hard to German, but do not forget the culture of the inner man—I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his sabre clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, his instrument—I trust, a chosen vessel unto him to bear his name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.⁴

³ Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813–1843) was a prominent minister in the Church of Scotland. He was educated at the University of Edinburgh and pastored St. Peter's Church of Dundee, Scotland from 1836 until his death in 1843; Spurgeon's knowledge of M'Cheyne would have been based largely on Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. R. M. M'Cheyne: Minister of St. Peter's Church, Dundee* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., and J. Nisbet & Co., 1845).

⁴ Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. R. M. M'Cheyne*, 243.

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For the herald of the gospel to be spiritually out of order in his own proper person is, both to himself and to his work, a most serious calamity, and yet, my brethren, how easily is such an evil produced, and with what watchfulness must it be guarded against! Travelling one day by express from Perth to Edinburgh, on a sudden we came to a dead stop, because a very small screw in one of the engines—every railway locomotive consisting virtually of two engines—had been broken, and when we started again we were obliged to crawl along with one piston-rod at work instead of two. Only a small screw was gone, if that had been right the train would have rushed along its iron road, but the absence of that insignificant piece of iron disarranged the whole. A train is said to have been stopped on one of the United States' railways by flies in the grease-boxes of the carriage wheels. The analogy is perfect; a man in all other respects fitted to be useful, may by some small defect be exceedingly hindered, or even rendered utterly useless. Such a result is all the more grievous, because it is associated with the gospel, which in the highest sense is adapted to effect the grandest results. It is a terrible thing when the healing balm loses its efficacy through the blunderer who administers it. You all know the injurious effects frequently produced upon water through flowing along leaden pipes.

Even so the gospel itself, in flowing through men who are spiritually unhealthy, may be debased until it grows injurious to their hearers. It is to be feared that Calvinistic doctrine becomes most evil teaching when it is set forth by men of ungodly lives, and exhibited as if it were a cloak for licentiousness; and Arminianism, on the other hand, with its wide sweep of the offer of mercy, may do most serious damage to the souls of men, if the careless tone of the preacher leads his hearers to believe that they can repent whenever they please, and that, therefore, no urgency surrounds the gospel message. Moreover, when a preacher is poor in grace, any lasting good which may be the result of his ministry, will

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usually be feeble and utterly out of proportion with what might have been expected. Much sowing will be followed by little reaping; the interest upon the talents will be inappreciably small. In two or three of the battles which were lost in the late American war, the result is said to have been due to the bad gunpowder which was served out by certain “shoddy” contractors to the army, so that the due effect of a cannonade was not produced. So it may be with us. We may miss our mark, lose our end and aim, and waste our time, through not possessing true vital force within ourselves, or not possessing it in such a degree that God could consistently bless us. Beware of being “shoddy” preachers.

Ministers must be converted themselves

It should be one of our first cares that we ourselves be saved men.

That a teacher of the gospel should first be a partaker of it is a simple truth, but at the same time a rule of the most weighty importance. We are not among those who accept the apostolical succession of young men simply because they assume it. If their college experience has been rather vivacious than spiritual, if their honours have been connected rather with athletic exercises than with labours for Christ, we demand evidence of another kind than they are able to present to us. No amount of fees paid to learned doctors, and no amount of classics received in return, appear to us to be evidences of a call from above. True and genuine piety is necessary as the first indispensable requisite. Whatever “call” a man may pretend to have, if he has not been called to holiness, he certainly has not been called to the ministry.

“First be trimmed thyself, and then adorn thy brother,” say the rabbins. “The hand,” saith Gregory, “that means to make another clean, must not itself be dirty.”⁵ If your salt be unsavoury

⁵ It is not clear to whom Spurgeon refers to here, nor is the origin of the quote known.

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how can you season others? Conversion is a *sine qua non* in a minister. Ye aspirants to our pulpits, "ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Nor is the possession of this first qualification a thing to be taken for granted by any man, for there is very great possibility of our being mistaken as to whether we are converted or not. Believe me, it is no child's play to "make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). The world is full of counterfeits, and swarms with panderers to carnal self-conceit, who gather around a minister as vultures around a carcass. Our own hearts are deceitful, so that truth lies not on the surface, but must be drawn up from the deepest well. We must search ourselves very anxiously and very thoroughly, lest by any means after having preached to others we ourselves should be castaways.

The perils of an unconverted ministry

How horrible to be a preacher of the gospel and yet to be unconverted! Let each man here whisper to his own inmost soul, "What a dreadful thing it will be for me if I should be ignorant of the power of the truth which I am preparing to proclaim!" Unconverted ministry involves the most unnatural relationships. A graceless pastor is a blind man elected to a professorship of optics, philosophising upon light and vision, discoursing upon and distinguishing to others the nice shades and delicate blendings of the prismatic colours, while he himself is absolutely in the dark. He is a dumb man elevated to the chair of music; a deaf man fluent upon symphonies and harmonies. He is a mole professing to educate eaglets; a limpet elected to preside over angels. To such a relationship one might apply the most absurd and grotesque metaphors, except that the subject is too solemn. It is a dreadful position for a man to stand in, for he has undertaken a work for which he is totally, wholly, and altogether unqualified, but from the responsibilities of which this unfitness will not screen him, because he willfully incurred them. Whatever his natural gifts, whatever his

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mental powers may be, he is utterly out of court for spiritual work if he has no spiritual life; and it is his duty to cease the ministerial office till he has received this first and simplest of qualifications for it.

Unconverted ministry must be equally dreadful in another respect. If the man has no commission, what a very unhappy position for him to occupy! What can he see in the experience of his people to give him comfort? How must he feel when he hears the cries of penitents; or listens to their anxious doubts and solemn fears? He must be astonished to think that his words should be owned to that end. The word of an unconverted man may be blessed to the conversion of souls, since the Lord, while he disowns the man, will still honour his own truth. How perplexed such a man must be when he is consulted concerning the difficulties of mature Christians. In the pathway of experience, in which his own regenerate hearers are led, he must feel himself quite at a loss. How can he listen to their deathbed joys, or join in their rapturous fellowships around the table of their Lord?

In many instances of young men put to a trade which they cannot endure, they have run away to sea sooner than follow an irksome business; but where shall that man flee who is apprenticed for life to this holy calling, and yet is a total stranger to the power of godliness? How can he daily bid men come to Christ, while he himself is a stranger to his dying love? O sirs, surely this must be perpetual slavery. Such a man must hate the sight of a pulpit as much as a galley-slave hates the oar.

And how unserviceable such a man must be. He has to guide travellers along a road which he has never trodden, to navigate a vessel along a coast of which he knows none of the landmarks. He is called to instruct others, being himself a fool. What can he be but a cloud without rain, a tree with leaves only. As when the caravan in the wilderness, all athirst and ready to die beneath the broiling sun, comes to the long desired well, and, horror of

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horrors, finds it without a drop of water; so when souls thirsting after God come to a graceless ministry, they are ready to perish because the water of life is not to be found. Better abolish pulpits than fill them with men who have no experimental knowledge of what they teach.

Alas, the unregenerate pastor becomes terribly mischievous too, for of all the causes which create infidelity, ungodly ministers must be ranked among the first. I read the other day, that no phase of evil presented so marvellous a power for destruction, as the unconverted minister of a parish, with a £1200 organ, a choir of ungodly singers, and an aristocratic congregation. It was the opinion of the writer, that there could be no greater instrument for damnation out of hell than that. People go to their place of worship and sit down comfortably, and think they must be Christians, when all the time all that their religion consists in, is listening to an orator, having their ears tickled with music, and perhaps their eyes amused with graceful action and fashionable manners; the whole being no better than what they hear and see at the opera—not so good, perhaps, in point of aesthetic beauty, and not an atom more spiritual. Thousands are congratulating themselves, and even blessing God that they are devout worshippers, when at the same time they are living in an unregenerate Christless state, having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. He who presides over a system which aims at nothing higher than formalism, is far more a servant of the devil than a minister of God.

A formal preacher is mischievous while he preserves his outward equilibrium, but as he is without the preserving balance of godliness, sooner or later he is almost sure to make a trip in his moral character, and what a position is he in then. How is God blasphemed, and the gospel abused!

A solemn warning to unconverted ministers

Terrible is it to consider what a death must await such a man, and what must be his after-condition. The prophet pictures the king of Babylon going down to hell, and all the kings and princes whom he had destroyed, and whose capitals he had laid waste, rising up from their places in Pandemonium, and saluting the fallen tyrant with the cutting sarcasm, “Art thou become like unto us?” (Isa. 14:10). And cannot you suppose a man who has been a minister, but who has lived without Christ in his heart, going down to hell, and all the imprisoned spirits who used to hear him, and all the ungodly of his parish rising up and saying to him in bitter tones, “Art thou also become as we are? Physician, didst thou not heal thyself? Art thou who claimed to be a shining light cast down into the darkness for ever?” Oh, if one must be lost, let it not be in this fashion! To be lost under the shadow of a pulpit is dreadful, but how much more so to perish from the pulpit itself!

There is an awful passage in John Bunyan’s⁶ treatise, entitled “Sighs from Hell,” which full often rings in my ears,

How many souls have blind priests been the means of destroying by their ignorance? Preaching that was no better for their souls than ratsbane to the body. Many of them, it is to be feared, have whole towns to answer for. Ah! friend, I tell thee, thou that hast taken in hand to preach to the people, it may be thou hast taken in hand thou canst not tell what. Will

⁶ John Bunyan (1628–1688) was a seventeenth century Puritan pastor who ministered in Bedfordshire. He is best known for his allegorical book, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, which Spurgeon claimed to have read over 100 times. Spurgeon famously said of Bunyan, “Read anything of his, and you will see that it is almost like reading the Bible itself.... He cannot give us his Pilgrim’s Progress—that sweetest of all prose poems—without continually making us feel and say, ‘Why, this man is a living Bible!’ Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him. He cannot speak without quoting a text, for his soul is full of the Word of God.” See C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography, Compiled from his Diary, Letters, and Records by His Wife and His Private Secretary*, vol. 4 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897), 268.

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it not grieve thee to see thy whole parish come bellowing after thee into hell? crying out, "This we have to thank thee for, thou wast afraid to tell us of our sins, lest we should not put meat fast enough into thy mouth. O cursed wretch, who wast not content, blind guide as thou wast, to fall into the ditch thyself, but hast also led us thither with thee."⁷

Richard Baxter,⁸ in his *Reformed Pastor*, amid much other solemn matter, writes as follows:

Take heed to yourselves lest you should be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual working of that gospel which you preach; and lest, while you proclaim the necessity of a Saviour to the world, your hearts should neglect him, and you should miss of an interest in him and his saving benefits. Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish while you call upon others to take heed of perishing, and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare their food. Though there be a promise of shining as stars to those that turn many to righteousness (Dan. 12:3), this is but on supposition that they be first turned to it themselves: such promises are made *caeteris paribus, et suppositis supponendis*. Their own sincerity in the faith is the condition of their glory simply considered, though their great ministerial labours may be a condition of the promise of their greater glory. Many men have warned others that they come not to that place of torment, which yet they hastened to themselves; many a preacher is now in hell, that hath an hundred times called upon his hearers to use the utmost care and diligence to escape it. Can any reasonable man imagine that

⁷ John Bunyan, "Sighs from Hell," in *The Entire Works of John Bunyan, Author of "The Pilgrim's Progress"*, edited with original introduction, notes, and memoir of the author, by Henry Stebbing, D. D., F. R. S., etc. vol. 1 (London: John Hirst, 1861), 155.

⁸ Richard Baxter (1615–1691) was a prominent seventeenth century Puritan pastor whose most well-known books are *The Reformed Pastor*, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*, and *A Call to the Unconverted*. Spurgeon was especially impacted by *A Call to the Unconverted* as a boy before he came to faith. See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897), 80.

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God should save men for offering salvation to others, while they refused it themselves, and for telling others those truths which they themselves neglected and abused? Many a tailor goes in rags that maketh costly clothes for others; and many a cook scarce licks his fingers, when he hath dressed for others the most costly dishes. Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, and consequently faithful in his Master's work. Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you be that which you persuade others to be, and believe that which you persuade them daily to believe, and have heartily entertained that Christ and Spirit which you offer unto others. He that bade you love your neighbours as yourselves, did imply that you should love yourselves and not hate and destroy both yourselves and them.⁹

My brethren, let these weighty sentences have due effect upon you. Surely there can be no need to add more, but let me pray you to examine yourselves, and so make good use of what has been addressed to you.

Ministers must be men of true piety

This first matter of true religion being settled, it is of the next importance to the minister that his piety be vigorous.

He is not to be content with being equal to the rank and file of Christians, he must be a mature and advanced believer, for the ministry of Christ has been truly called "the choicest of his choice, the elect of his election, a church picked out of the church." If he were called to an ordinary position, and to common work, common grace might perhaps satisfy him, though even then it would be an indolent satisfaction; but being elect to extraordinary

⁹ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, ed. William Brown, 5th ed. (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1862), 20.

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labours, and called to a place of unusual peril, he should be anxious to possess that superior strength which alone is adequate to his station. His pulse of vital godliness must beat strongly and regularly; his eye of faith must be bright; his foot of resolution must be firm; his hand of activity must be quick; his whole inner man must be in the highest degree of sanity.

It is said of the Egyptians that they chose their priests from the most learned of their philosophers, and then they esteemed their priests so highly, that they chose their kings from them. We require to have for God's ministers the pick of all the Christian host; such men indeed, that if the nation wanted kings they could not do better than elevate them to the throne. Our weakest-minded, most timid, most carnal, and most ill-balanced men are not suitable candidates for the pulpit. There are some works which we should never allot to the invalid or deformed. A man may not be qualified for climbing lofty buildings, his brain may be too weak, and elevated work might place him in great danger; by all means let him keep on the ground and find useful occupation where a steady brain is less important. There are brethren who have analogous spiritual deficiencies, they cannot be called to service which is conspicuous and elevated, because their heads are too weak. If they were permitted a little success they would be intoxicated with vanity—a vice all too common among ministers, and of all things the least becoming in them, and the most certain to secure them a fall. Should we as a nation be called to defend our hearths and homes, we should not send out our boys and girls with swords and guns to meet the foe, neither may the church send out every fluent novice or inexperienced zealot to plead for the faith. The fear of the Lord must teach the young man wisdom, or he is barred from the pastorate; the grace of God must mature his spirit, or he had better tarry till power be given him from on high.

Held to a higher standard

The highest moral character must be sedulously maintained. Many are disqualified for office in the church who are well enough as simple members. I hold very stern opinions with regard to Christian men who have fallen into gross sin. I rejoice that they may be truly converted, and may be with mingled hope and caution received into the church, but I question, gravely question whether a man who has grossly sinned should be very readily restored to the pulpit. As John Angell James¹⁰ remarks, "When a preacher of righteousness has stood in the way of sinners, he should never again open his lips in the great congregation until his repentance is as notorious as his sin."¹¹ Let those who have been shorn by the sons of Ammon tarry at Jericho till their beards be grown; this has often been used as a taunt to beardless boys to whom it is evidently inapplicable, it is an accurate enough metaphor for dishonoured and characterless men, let their age be what it may. Alas, the beard of reputation once shorn is hard to grow again. Open immorality, in most cases, however deep the repentance, is a fatal sign that ministerial graces were never in the man's character. Caesar's wife must be beyond suspicion, and there must be no ugly rumours as to ministerial inconsistency in the past, or the hope of usefulness will be slender. Into the church such fallen ones are to be received as penitents, and into the ministry they may be received if God puts them there; my doubt is not about that, but as to whether God ever did place them there; and my belief is that we should be very slow to help back to the pulpit

¹⁰ John Angell James (1785–1859) was a popular Congregationalist preacher. His most well-known book is *The Anxious Inquirer After Salvation Directed and Encouraged*, which had a significant impact on Spurgeon before he came to faith in Christ. See Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897), 104, 208–209.

¹¹ John Angell James, *Christian Fellowship, or The Church Member's Guide: To Which is Added, A Pastoral Charge, Delivered to the Rev. Thomas James, at the Time of His Ordination in City Chapel, London* (Birmingham: B. Hudson, 1822), 55.

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men, who having been once tried, have proved themselves to have too little grace to stand the crucial test of ministerial life.

For some work we choose none but the strong; and when God calls us to ministerial labour we should endeavour to get grace that we may be strengthened into fitness for our position, and not be mere novices carried away by the temptations of Satan, to the injury of the church and our own ruin. We are to stand equipped with the whole armour of God, ready for feats of valour not expected of others. To us self-denial, self-forgetfulness, patience, perseverance, longsuffering, must be every-day virtues, and who is sufficient for these things? We had need live very near to God, if we would approve ourselves in our vocation.

Recollect, as ministers, that your whole life, your whole pastoral life especially, will be affected by the vigour of your piety. If your zeal grows dull, you will not pray well in the pulpit; you will pray worse in the family, and worst in the study alone. When your soul becomes lean, your hearers, without knowing how or why, will find that your prayers in public have little savour for them; they will feel your barrenness, perhaps, before you perceive it yourself. Your discourses will next betray your declension. You may utter as well-chosen words, and as fitly-ordered sentences, as aforetime; but there will be a perceptible loss of spiritual force. You will shake yourselves as at other times, even as Samson did, but you will find that your great strength has departed. In your daily communion with your people, they will not be slow to mark the all-pervading decline of your graces. Sharp eyes will see the grey hairs here and there long before you do. Let a man be afflicted with a disease of the heart, and all evils are wrapped up in that one—stomach, lungs, viscera, muscles, and nerves will all suffer; and so, let a man have his heart weakened in spiritual things, and very soon his entire life will feel the withering influence. Moreover, as the result of your own decline, everyone of your hearers will suffer more or less; the vigorous amongst them will overcome

the depressing tendency, but the weaker sort will be seriously damaged. It is with us and our hearers as it is with watches and the public clock; if our watch be wrong, very few will be misled by it but ourselves; but if the Horse Guards or Greenwich Observatory should go amiss, half London would lose its reckoning. So is it with the minister; he is the parish-clock, many take their time from him, and if he be incorrect, then they all go wrongly, more or less, and he is in a great measure accountable for all the sin which he occasions. This we cannot endure to think of, my brethren. It will not bear a moment's comfortable consideration, and yet it must be looked at that we may guard against it.

The unique dangers facing ministers

You must remember, too, that we have need of very vigorous piety, because our danger is so much greater than that of others. Upon the whole, no place is so assailed with temptation as the ministry. Despite the popular idea that ours is a snug retreat from temptation, it is no less true that our dangers are more numerous and more insidious than those of ordinary Christians. Ours may be a vantage-ground for height, but that height is perilous, and to many the ministry has proved a Tarpeian rock. If you ask what these temptations are, time might fail us to particularise them, but among them are both the coarser and the more refined. The coarser are such temptations as self-indulgence at the table, enticements to which are superabundant among a hospitable people; the temptations of the flesh, which are incessant with young unmarried men set on high among an admiring throng of young women; but enough of this, your own observation will soon reveal to you a thousand snares, unless indeed your eyes are blinded. There are more secret snares than these, from which we can less easily escape, and of these the worst is the temptation to ministerialism—the tendency to read our Bibles as ministers, to pray as ministers, to get into doing the whole of our religion as not

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ourselves personally, but only relatively, concerned in it. To lose the personality of repentance and faith is a loss indeed. "No man," says John Owen,¹² "preaches his sermon well to others if he doth not first preach it to his own heart."¹³ Brethren, it is eminently hard to keep to this. Our office, instead of helping our piety, as some assert, is through the evil of our natures turned into one of its most serious hindrances; at least, I find it so. How one kicks and struggles against officialism, and yet how easily doth it beset us, like a long garment which twists around the racer's feet and impedes his running. Beware, dear brethren, of this and all the other seductions of your calling; and if you have done so until now, continue still to watch till life's latest hour.

We have noted but one of the perils, but indeed they are legion. The great enemy of souls takes care to leave no stone unturned for the preacher's ruin. "Take heed to yourselves," says Baxter,

because the tempter will make his first and sharpest onset upon you. If you will be the leaders against him, he will spare you no further than God restraineth him. He beareth you the greatest malice that are engaged to do him the greatest mischief. As he hateth Christ more than any of us, because he is the General of the field, and the "Captain of our salvation," and doth more than all the world besides against the kingdom of darkness; so doth he note the leaders under him more than the common soldiers, on the like account, in their proportion. He knows what a rout he may make among the rest, if the leaders fall before their eyes. He hath long tried that way of fighting, "neither with small nor great," comparatively, but these; and of "smiting the shepherds, that

¹² John Owen (1616–1683) was one of the most prominent Puritan theologians of the seventeenth century. He was a parish pastor, chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, and eventually a Nonconformist pastor after the "Great Ejection" of 1662. Owen's most famous books include *On the Mortification of Sin*, *On Communion with God*, and *On the Glories of Christ*.

¹³ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen, D. D.*, ed. William H. Goold (London and Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1851), 455.

he may scatter the flock.” And so great has been his success this way, that he will follow it on as far as he is able. Take heed, therefore, brethren, for the enemy hath a special eye upon you. You shall have his most subtle insinuations, and incessant solicitations, and violent assaults. As wise and learned as you are, take heed to yourselves lest he overwit you. The devil is a greater scholar than you, and a nimbler disputant; he can “transform himself into an angel of light” to deceive. He will get within you and trip up your heels before you are aware; he will play the juggler with you undiscerned, and cheat you of your faith or innocency, and you shall not know that you have lost it; nay, he will make you believe it is multiplied or increased when it is lost. You shall see neither hook nor line, much less the subtle angler himself, while he is offering you his bait. And his baits shall be so fitted to your temper and disposition, that he will be sure to find advantages within you, and make your own principles and inclinations to betray you; and whenever he ruineth you, he will make you the instrument of your own ruin. Oh, what a conquest will he think he hath got, if he can make a minister lazy and unfaithful; if he can tempt a minister into covetousness or scandal! He will glory against the church, and say, “These are your holy preachers: you see what their preciseness is, and whither it will bring them.” He will glory against Jesus Christ himself, and say, “These are thy champions! I can make thy chiefest servants to abuse thee; I can make the stewards of thy house unfaithful.” If he did so insult against God upon a false surmise, and tell him he could make Job to curse him to his face (Job 1:2), what would he do if he should indeed prevail against us? And at last he will insult as much over you that ever he could draw you to be false to your great trust, and to blemish your holy profession, and to do him so much service that was your enemy. O do not so far gratify Satan; do not make him so much sport: suffer him not to use you as the Philistines did Samson—first to deprive you of your strength, and then to put

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out your eyes, and so to make you the matter of his triumph and derision.¹⁴

Once more. We must cultivate the highest degree of godliness because our work imperatively requires it. The labour of the Christian ministry is well performed in exact proportion to the vigour of our renewed nature. Our work is only well done when it is well with ourselves. As is the workman, such will the work be. To face the enemies of truth, to defend the bulwarks of the faith, to rule well in the house of God, to comfort all that mourn, to edify the saints, to guide the perplexed, to bear with the froward, to win and nurse souls—all these and a thousand other works beside are not for a Feeble-mind or a Ready-to-halt, but are reserved for Great-heart whom the Lord has made strong for himself.¹⁵ Seek then strength from the Strong One, wisdom from the Wise One, in fact, all from the God of all.

Ministers must possess godly character

Thirdly, let the minister take care that his personal character agrees in all respects with his ministry.

We have all heard the story of the man who preached so well and lived so badly, that when he was in the pulpit everybody said he ought never to come out again, and when he was out of it they all declared he never ought to enter it again. From the imitation of such a Janus may the Lord deliver us. May we never be priests of God at the altar, and sons of Belial outside the tabernacle door; but on the contrary, may we, as Nazianzen says of Basil, “thunder in our doctrine, and lightning in our conversation.”¹⁶ We do not

¹⁴ Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 49–51.

¹⁵ Here, Spurgeon references classic characters from John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which is to Come; Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream* (Kettering: J. Toller, 1843), 311–333.

¹⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390) was the Archbishop of Constantinople. Basil the Great (330–379) was the Bishop of Caesarea. Both men along with Gregory of

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trust those persons who have two faces, nor will men believe in those whose verbal and practical testimonies are contradictory. As actions, according to the proverb, speak louder than words, so an ill life will effectually drown the voice of the most eloquent ministry. After all, our truest building must be performed with our hands; our characters must be more persuasive than our speech. Here I would not alone warn you of sins of commission, but of sins of omission. Too many preachers forget to serve God when they are out of the pulpit, their lives are negatively inconsistent. Abhor, dear brethren, the thought of being clockwork ministers who are not alive by abiding grace within, but are wound up by temporary influences; men who are only ministers for the time being, under the stress of the hour of ministering, but cease to be ministers when they descend the pulpit stairs. True ministers are always ministers. Too many preachers are like those sand-toys we buy for our children; you turn the box upside down, and the little acrobat revolves and revolves till the sand is all run down, and then he hangs motionless; so there are some who persevere in the ministrations of truth as long as there is an official necessity for their work, but after that, no pay, no paternoster; no salary, no sermon.

It is a horrible thing to be an inconsistent minister. Our Lord is said to have been like Moses, for this reason, that he was “a prophet mighty in word and in deed.” The man of God should imitate his Master in this; he should be mighty both in the word of his doctrine and in the deed of his example, and mightiest, if possible, in the second. It is remarkable that the only church history we have is, “The Acts of the apostles.” The Holy Spirit has not preserved their sermons. They were very good ones, better

Nyssa are known as the Cappadocian Fathers, staunch defenders of Nicene orthodoxy. I have not been able to discover the original source of the quote Spurgeon mentions here, but it is contained in John Spencer, *Things New & Old: or, A Storehouse of Similes, Sentences, Allegories, Apophthegms, Adages, Apologues, Divine, Moral, Political, etc.*, vol. 2 (London: William Tegg, 1868), 130.

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than we shall ever preach, but still the Holy Spirit has only taken care of their "acts." We have no books of the resolutions of the apostles; when we hold our church-meetings we record our minutes and resolutions, but the Holy Spirit only puts down the "acts." Our acts should be such as to bear recording, for recorded they will be. We must live as under the more immediate eye of God, and as in the blaze of the great all-revealing day.

The magnetic power of a holy life

Holiness in a minister is at once his chief necessity and his goodliest ornament. Mere moral excellence is not enough, there must be the higher virtue; a consistent character there must be, but this must be anointed with the sacred consecrating oil, or that which makes us most fragrant to God and man will be wanting. Old John Stoughton,¹⁷ in his treatise entitled *The Preacher's Dignity and Duty*, insists upon the minister's holiness in sentences full of weight.

If Uzzah must die but for touching the ark of God, and that to stay it when it was like to fall; if the men of Beth-shemesh for looking into it; if the very beasts that do but come near the holy mount be threatened; then what manner of persons ought they to be who shall be admitted to talk with God familiarly, to "stand before him," as the angels do, and "behold his face continually;" "to bear the ark upon their shoulders," "to bear his name before the Gentiles;" in a word, to be his ambassadors? 'Holiness becometh thy house, O Lord;' and were it not a ridiculous thing to imagine, that the vessels must be holy, the vestures must be holy, all must be holy, but only he upon whose very garments must be written "holiness to the Lord," might be unholy; that the bells of the horses should have an inscription of holiness upon them, in Zechariah, and the saints' bells, the

¹⁷ John Stoughton (1593–1639) was an English Puritan pastor.

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bells of Aaron, should be unhallowed? No, they must be “burning and shining lights,” or else their influence will dart some malignant quality; they must “chew the cud and divide the hoof,” or else they are unclean; they must “divide the word aright,” and walk uprightly in their life, and so join life to learning. If holiness be wanting, the ambassadors dishonour the country from whence they come, and the prince from whom they come; and this dead Amasa, this dead doctrine not quickened with a good life, lying in the way, stops the people of the Lord, that they cannot go on cheerfully in their spiritual warfare.¹⁸

The life of the preacher should be a magnet to draw men to Christ, and it is sad indeed when it keeps them from him. Sanctity in ministers is a loud call to sinners to repent, and when allied with holy cheerfulness it becomes wondrously attractive. Jeremy Taylor¹⁹ in his own rich language tell us,

Herod’s doves could never have invited so many strangers to their dove-cotes, if they had not been besmeared with opobalsamum: but, ἐὰν μύρω χρήσης τας περιστερὰς, καὶ ἔξωθεν ἄλλας ἄξουσιν, said Didymus; “make your pigeons smell sweet, and they will allure whole flocks;” and if your life be excellent, if your virtues be like a precious ointment, you will soon invite your charges to run “*in odorem unguentorum*,” “after your precious odours:” but you must be excellent, not “*tanquam unus de populo*,” but “*tanquam homo Dei*;” you must be a man of God, not after the common manner of men, but ‘after God’s own heart;’ and men will strive to be like you, if you be like to God: but when you

¹⁸ The original source of this citation is found in John Stoughton, “The Preachers Dignity and Duty” in *XV. Choice Sermons Preached Upon Selected Occasions, in Cambridge, viz. I. The Preacher’s Dignity, and Duty, etc.* (London: R. B. for John Bellamie, Henry Overton, John Rothwell, and Ralph Smith, 1640), 89–91.

¹⁹ Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667) was a prominent minister in the Church of England and served as the Bishop of Down and Connor in Ireland as well as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dublin.

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only stand at the door of virtue, for nothing but to keep sin out, you will draw into the folds of Christ none but such as fear drives in. “*Ad majorem Dei gloriam*,” “To do what will most glorify God,” that is the line you must walk by: for to do no more than all men needs must is servility, not so much as the affection of sons; much less can you be fathers to the people, when you go not so far as the sons of God: for a dark lantern, though there be a weak brightness on one side, will scarce enlighten one, much less will it conduct a multitude, or allure many followers by the brightness of its flame.²⁰

Another equally admirable episcopal divine²¹ has well and pithily said,

The star which led the wise men unto Christ, the pillar of fire which led the children unto Canaan, did not only shine, but go before them (Matt. 2:9; Exod. 13:21). The voice of Jacob will do little good if the hands be the hands of Esau. In the law, no person who had any blemish was to offer the oblations of the Lord (Lev. 21:17–20); the Lord thereby teaching us what graces ought to be in his ministers. The priest was to have in his robes bells and pomegranates; the one a figure of sound doctrine, and the other of a fruitful life (Exod. 28:33, 34). The Lord will be sanctified in all those that draw near unto him (Isa. 52:11); for the sins of the priests make the people abhor the offering of the Lord (1 Sam. 2:17); their wicked lives do shame their doctrine; *Pas-sionem Christi annunciant profitendo, male agendo exhonorant*, as St. Austin speaks: with their doctrine they build, and with their lives they destroy. I conclude this point with that wholesome passage of *Hierom ad Nepotianum*. Let not, saith he, thy works shame thy doctrine, lest they who hear thee in the church tacitly answer, Why doest thou not thyself

²⁰ Jeremy Taylor, *The Works of Jeremy Taylor, D. D. with Some Account of His Life, Summary of Each Discourse, Notes, etc.*, ed. T. S. Hughes (London: A. J. Valpy, M.A., 1831), 155.

²¹ Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) was the Bishop of Norwich from 1660 to 1676.

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what thou teachest to others? He is too delicate a teacher who persuadeth others to fast with a full belly. A robber may accuse covetousness. *Sacerdotis Christi os, mens, manusque concordant*; a minister of Christ should have his tongue, and his heart, and his hand agree.²²

Very quaint also is the language of Thomas Playfere²³ in his *Say Well, Do Well*.

There was a ridiculous actor in the city of Smyrna, who, pronouncing *O caelum!* O heaven! pointed with his finger towards the ground; which when Polemo, the chiefest man in the place, saw, he could abide to stay no longer, but went from the company in a great chafe, saying ‘This fool hath made a solecism with his hand, he has spoken false Latin with his finger.’ And such are they who teach well and do ill; that however they have heaven at their tongue’s end, yet the earth is at their finger’s end; such as do not only speak false Latin with their tongue, but false divinity with their hands; such as live not according to their preaching. But he that sits in the heaven will laugh them to scorn, and hiss them off the stage, if they do not mend their action.²⁴

Attention to detail

Even in little things the minister should take care that his life is consistent with his ministry. He should be especially careful never to fall short of his word. This should be pushed even to scrupulosity; we cannot be too careful; truth must not only be in us, but shine from us. A celebrated doctor of divinity in London, who is now in heaven I have no doubt—a very excellent and godly man—

²² Edward Reynolds, *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edwards Reynolds, D. D., Lord Bishop of Norwich, etc.*, vol. 5 (London: B. Holdsworth, 1826), 404–405.

²³ Thomas Playfere (1561–1609) was an Anglican theologian, professor at Cambridge University, and chaplain to King James I.

²⁴ John Spencer, *Things New & Old: or, A Storehouse of Similes, Sentences, Allegories, Apophthegms, Adages, Apologues, Divine, Moral, Political, etc.*, vol. 1 (London: William Tegg, 1867), 337.

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gave notice one Sunday that he intended to visit all his people, and said, that in order to be able to get round and visit them and their families once in the year, he should take all the seatholders in order. A person well known to me, who was then a poor man, was delighted with the idea that the minister was coming to his house to see him, and about a week or two before he conceived it would be his turn, his wife was very careful to sweep the hearth and keep the house tidy, and the man ran home early from work, hoping each night to find the doctor there. This went on for a considerable time. He either forgot his promise, or grew weary in performing it, or for some other reason never went to this poor man's house, and the result was this, the man lost confidence in all preachers, and said, "They care for the rich, but they do not care for us who are poor." That man never settled down to any one place of worship for many years, till at last he dropped into Exeter Hall and remained my hearer for years till providence removed him. It was no small task to make him believe that any minister could be an honest man, and could impartially love both rich and poor. Let us avoid doing such mischief, by being very particular as to our word.

We must remember that we are very much looked at. Men hardly have the impudence to break the law in the open sight of their fellows, yet in such publicity we live and move. We are watched by a thousand eagle eyes. Let us so act that we shall never need to care if all heaven, and earth, and hell, swelled the list of spectators. Our public position is a great gain if we are enabled to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. Take heed, brethren, that you throw not away the advantage.

When we say to you, my dear brethren, take care of your life, we mean be careful of even the minutiae of your character. Avoid little debts, unpunctuality, gossiping, nicknaming, petty quarrels, and all other of those little vices which fill the ointment with flies. The self-indulgences which have lowered the reputé of many

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must not be tolerated by us. The familiarities which have laid others under suspicion, we must chastely avoid. The roughnesses which have rendered some obnoxious, and the fopperies which have made others contemptible, we must put away. We cannot afford to run great risks through little things. Our care must be to act on the rule, "giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed" (2 Cor. 6:3).

By this is not intended that we are to hold ourselves bound by every whim or fashion of the society in which we move. As a general rule, I hate the fashions of society, and detest conventionalities, and if I conceived it best to put my foot through a law of etiquette, I should feel gratified in having it to do. No, we are men, not slaves, and are not to relinquish our manly freedom, to be the lacqueys of those who affect gentility or boast refinement. Yet, brethren, anything that verges upon the coarseness which is akin to sin, we must shun as we would a viper. The rules of Chesterfield are ridiculous to us, but not the example of Christ, and he was never coarse, low, discourteous, or indelicate.

Even in your recreations, remember that you are ministers. When you are off the parade you are still officers in the army of Christ, and as such demean yourselves. But if the lesser things must be looked after, how careful should you be in the great matters of morality, honesty, and integrity! Here the minister must not fail. His private life must ever keep good tune with his ministry, or his day will soon set with him, and the sooner he retires the better, for his continuance in his office will only dishonour the cause of God and ruin himself.

2

The Call to the Ministry

Introduction

Some of Spurgeon's most distinctive contributions to the discipline of pastoral theology appear in his treatment of the subject of the call to the ministry. In this lecture on the topic, which is among his most well-known, Spurgeon identifies four main elements of a call to pastoral ministry. The first is what he calls "an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work" and "an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst" to preach the gospel. In this first element, it is almost impossible to imagine that Spurgeon's own personality and temperament did not affect his thinking. Spurgeon simply could not conceive of a man stepping into the ministry with anything less than an all-consuming, insatiable appetite for the work of preaching and pastoral care. What he termed "soul-winning" was like necessary food to Spurgeon, and preaching Christ like needed drink.

Spurgeon identifies aptness to teach as the second element contributing to a call to the ministry. As a matter of policy, the Pastors' College under Spurgeon's leadership only received into admission students who demonstrated at least two years of preaching experience before applying.¹ As he says in the lecture, "We never tried to make a minister, and should fail if we did; we receive none into the College but those who profess to be ministers already." Spurgeon himself had about a year of preaching experience under his belt before he took up his first pastorate in the

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records by His Wife and his Private Secretary*, vol. 2 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1898), 148–149.

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small village of Waterbeach as a seventeen-year-old. By the time he arrived in London at the age of nineteen to pastor the New Park Street Chapel he had already preached over 600 sermons.²

The third indicator that a man is called to the ministry, according to Spurgeon, is that souls are actually saved under his preaching. He believed the ultimate aim of the ministry was soul-winning, and thus, it was simply to be expected that if a man was indeed called to the ministry, God would supply the fruit of conversion as an endorsement of that call. Thus, Spurgeon held the conversions of souls to be one of surest indications of a man's call to ministry.

Spurgeon asserts that the final seal of a call to ministry is found in what might be called the "external call." This call is conferred by the collective judgement of a local church congregation. Spurgeon believed that the congregation's approval was an altogether necessary part of a man's call to ministry. It was not enough for the man himself to feel an all-absorbing, internal desire for the work. His own sense of his call must meet also with the approval of the congregation, which ultimately has the final say in the man's call to the ministry.

Spurgeon was unswerving in his conviction that all four of these conditions must be met if indeed a man was to be properly called to pastoral ministry.

² Eric W. Hayden, "Did you know," *Christian History*, 29, no. 1 (1991): 2.

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