

# EXCERPTS FROM

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# THE LINK

**North Road Chapel** (Evangelical)

**BIDEFORD**

## Internet Edition

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL

In a day when things are appraised by their apparent success or failure, are we to judge Christian work by the same standards, and how is the minister of the Word of God to be assessed?

First, let it be said that a preacher is not responsible for his success. He is responsible for what he preaches. He is accountable to God for his words, his life and his actions, but he is not responsible for other people.

In the Scriptures the minister of the gospel is likened to the following:

1. An ambassador - a minister representing his own country in a foreign court. Such is commissioned to serve his king in a foreign land and to treat of affairs of state in accordance with the authority vested in him by the government he represents, but as he faithfully discharges his duties he will not be held liable for the reaction of the country to which he has been assigned.

2. A fisherman. Fishing, as all other trades, is governed by rules, and certain standards must be observed. This applies whether the fisherman be a linesman or a trawler operator. Such are not answerable for the number of fish which they catch, but for the way in which they fish.

3. A sower. To sow the seed over the whole field is the task of the sower. Although some of the seed may fall upon thin shallow headlands, some on heavy clay bottoms, some on rocky hillsides and some on fertile loam, the variable yield which is the inevitable result, is not the responsibility of the sower.

In Scripture, the success of the preacher is always assessed by his faithfulness to Truth, and his submission to the will of God. This is emphasized by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16:

"Now thanks be unto God, which ALWAYS causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are a savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?"

It was an aged man who wrote these words, one who had known great opposition, much loneliness, bitter persecution, and hostile ostracism, yet he says, God ALWAYS causeth me to triumph.

Paul was conscious of triumph in shipwreck, of triumph when scourged, of triumph when in stocks, of triumph when stoned, of triumph when driven out as he shook the dust of the city from off his feet - yes, it is all TKIUMPE says the great Apostle. It certainly did not appear to be so to the onlookers, but this great man of God was an ambassador of heaven and was conducting his business according to the terms of the kingdom which he represented, and he knew the kingdom of God to be invincible, and that in every place where he ministered God was making manifest the savour of his knowledge. In being faithful to God and to truth, Paul knew that the purposes of the eternal God were being infallibly outworked.

When a preacher has grasped this truth he will cease from anxiety and turmoil and will consistently and faithfully work away at his task, being "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor.15:58). Visible results should not be foremost in the preacher's mind, being possessed with the knowledge that he is an ambassador of a kingdom which "cannot be moved" (Heb.12:28).

God's purposes can never fail, his plans cannot miscarry, his will must be done, and all that he has predetermined will be accomplished down to the last detail.

Although there is an apparent lack of fruit for our labours it doesn't signify that there will be none. Let us take note of the words of Isaiah 55:8-11:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

The preacher's business is to obey the One who commissioned him.

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15)

As he does this, so the Holy Spirit will attend his ministry in quickening power to the salvation of God's elect. Thus, out of every kindred, tribe and nation, God will call out that people for Himself: they are "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5) • ALL THESE WILL HE EFFECTUALLY CALLED through the preaching of the gospel; such are "HIS SHEEP"; they SHALL hear my voice, them also I MUST bring - Cf. John 10:16. It is not "they may" hear my voice and "they might" come if they are willing: there is not an "IF" or a "PEHHAPS" in the eternal purpose; everything is positive and unqualified. God does not send forth his servants to "draw a bow at a venture".

Preaching may not always accomplish the things which we please but we are not to be discouraged at the goats who heed not the preaching of the Truth of God. His Word infallibly accomplishes His purpose, and this, both with respect to the goats and the sheep.

As we are faithful in our ministry, so we ALWAYS TRIUMPH: furthermore, we are "unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish" (2 Cor.2:15).

Although the gospel is "a sweet savour" everywhere it is preached, yet, it produces vastly different effects in different persons. To one it is a savour of life unto life, to another, it is a savour of death unto death, but in this THE MINISTER IS HOT RESPONSIBLE. Was it not C.H.Spurgeon who said, "the same sun which will melt wax will harden clay". So it is with sinners and "the Sun of Righteousness".

As Christ is preached to some their hearts are opened like Lydia in Acts 16:14, to others their hearts are hardened, they despise the Truth and scoff at the message of life. To the one it is preached to their salvation, to the other it is preached to condemnation: but it ALWAYS accomplishes the thing whereto it was sent. Cf. Isaiah 55.11.

So, if in our negotiations as ambassadors, things do not go OUR WAY what of it? As long as we are loyal to our Head and His kingdom. It could well be that we are called to cast our net in waters where apparently there is very little doing: then let us be faithful. Often it is by such stagnant lifeless pools the Head of the church places a man to fish in its murky depths for many a long year in order to reach just one, whom He knoweth to be His. Such are the mysteries of the kingdom.

Similarly, with the sower. His seed is "THE WORD OF GOD" (Luke 8:11); not just the message of salvation, but also the law of God and the moral teaching of the scriptures, yea, the whole counsel of Holy Writ from Genesis to Revelation, is the seed which the minister has to sow. The scattering of the seed is not to be limited to the fertile loam. "The field is the world" and God's Truth is to be preached to "all nations". It is to be preached to condemnation as well as to salvation. Sown by the wayside, on hard ground and among thorns, yea, by "all waters".

This, and this alone, is the responsibility of the minister of the gospel; the final outcome is with the great Head of the church who has said "YE SHALL BE WITNESSES UNTO ME" (Acts 1:8), but, "I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH" (Matt. 16:18).

Sow in the morn thy seed,  
At eve hold not thy hand;  
To doubt and fear give thou no heed,  
Broadcast it o'er the land.

Thou know'st not which may thrive,  
The late or early sown;  
Grace keeps the chosen germ alive,  
When and wherever strewn.

Thou canst not toil in vain;  
Cold, heat, and moist and dry,  
Shall foster and mature the grain  
For garnerers in the sky.

Thence when the glorious end,  
The Day of God, is come,  
The angel reapers shall descend  
And heaven cry, 'Harvest-home!'  
James Montgomery.

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W.H.M.

The following is an article which was published in November 1977 in the Gospel Tidings Magazine under the heading of:

MINISTERS OUGHT NOT TO BE DISCOURAGED  
BY WANT OF SUCCESS.

A godly clergyman was greatly discouraged after many years of hard labour among his people, at seeing no spiritual harvest reaped. He was so much troubled that he meditated changing his field of employment, believing that he might prove more successful in another sphere. Whilst his mind was taken up with these sad thoughts, he dreamed that he was a poor man seeking employment, and that at last he found an employer who gave him a sledge

hammer, and showed him an immense rock as large as the largest church, and told him to hammer upon the rock until he had split it to pieces. After hammering for some time, he remonstrated that the work given him to do was impossible. His employer replied, "That is nothing to you; I shall pay you for doing the work. Whether you succeed or not is no concern of yours. Do you the work! Only do the work!" Upon this he redoubled his blows, but was on the point several times of laying the instrument down. Still the employer said, "keep to your work: smite the rock! smite the rock! and he kept on smiting, with his heart sinking at the hopelessness of the effort, when all at once the rock rent asunder, and by the convulsion he awoke from his dream. The impression did not end in a dream, for the devoted pastor took courage, and continued his efforts in the old sphere with fresh zeal; and it was not long before he saw the fruit of his labour, and had the privilege of gathering in a glorious harvest of enquiring souls.

The Remembrancer.

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CALVIN'S DOCTRINE & PRACTICE OF PREACHING  
(Continued).

Calvin makes much of the fact that God does not ordinarily allow his voice to sound like thunder from heaven. Usually, when he had something to say to his people, he spoke through a prophet whose speech God so closely identified with his Word that it could be said that the mouth of the prophet was the mouth of God. "The Word goeth out of the mouth of God in such a manner that it likewise goeth out of the mouth of men; for God does not speak openly from heaven but employs men as his instruments" (Comm. Is. 55.11). "Among the many noble endowments with which God has adorned the human race, one of the most remarkable is that he deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men, making his own voice be heard in them" (Inst.4:1:15). Calvin comments on the power of Haggai's word to stir up the people to recommence the work of building the temple: "The people received not what they heard from the mouth of mortal men otherwise than if the majesty of God had openly appeared. For there was no ocular view of God given; but the

message of the prophet obtained as much power as though God descended from heaven, and had given manifest tokens of his presence. We may then conclude from these words that the glory of God so shines in his Word that we ought to be so much affected by it whenever he speaks by his servants as though he were nigh us, face to face" (Comm. Hag. 1.12).

Lest you should think that Calvin's view is based entirely on the Old Testament prophets, let us take two quotations from his commentaries on the New Testament: first from John 10:14 ("They know his voice") - "Christ speaks here of ministers, yet he does not say that they are heard, but that God himself is heard speaking by them". Again he says: "This ought to add no small reverence for the Gospel, since we ought not so much to consider men as speaking to us, as Christ by his own mouth; for at the time when he promised to publish God's name to men he had ceased to be in the world. It was not, however, to no purpose that he claimed this office as his own, for he really performs it through his disciples" (Comm. Heb.2:11).

In what way is preaching, the Word of God? According to Calvin, in two ways: as exposition and as embassy.

1. Preaching is the Word of God derivatively, as exposition of the Word of God. As previously noted in connection with the herald and the steward, the preacher's work is to pass on the message he has been given. That message is the Gospel, the Word of God, the Scriptures.

Calvin says: "God will not come down from heaven, neither will he send his angels to bring us revelations from above; but he will be known to us by his Word. Therefore he will have his ministers make known his Truth." Calvin has a wonderful comment on God's sending Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:31): "frantic men require inspirations and revelations from heaven and in the mean season they despise the ministers of God by whose hands they ought to be governed. Others who trust too much on their own wit will vouchsafe to hear no man and they will read no commentaries. But God will not have us despise these helps ... Not only is the Scripture given



us but interpreters and teachers are also added to be helps to us. For this cause the Lord sent Philip rather than an angel to the eunuch ... Assuredly this is no small commendation of external preaching that the voice of God sounds in the mouth of a man when angels hold their peace."

The preacher asks what he shall preach. Calvin answers that mere human thought has no place, in the pulpit. God speaks only through his Word, the Scriptures.

Before he can say "Thus says the Lord", the preacher must know clearly what it is the Lord says and how it applies to his hearers. Scripture is both the criterion and the criticism of preaching. Calvin frequently expressed this truth under the figure of a school: "None will ever be a good minister of the Word of God unless he first be a scholar". It ought to be said that by 'scholar' he does not mean an academic expert, but a schoolboy! In another place he likens preachers to schoolboys, and God to the schoolmaster: "How many ministers of the Word one sees who are poorly trained in the Holy Scripture! ... For they have never made a habit of moulding themselves entirely to the language of the Holy Spirit like good pupils. If a pupil be a man of parts and his schoolmaster is a good teacher, he will certainly not only remember what he has been taught, but he will also retain some characteristics of his schoolmaster, so that it will be said 'He was at such-and-such a school'." (Sermons on 2 Timothy).

In other words, the preacher must say what Scripture says, but must at the same time make it clear that it is Scripture that says it. Not only must the preaching be Scriptural, but it must be seen to be Scriptural. T.H.L. Parker summarises it like this: "The relationship between Scripture and preaching is not just close - it is indissoluble".

2. Preaching is the Word of God by authorisation, because the preacher is sent in the name of God. The ambassador, as noted above, went to a foreign court in the name of his king to represent him and deliver his message. He went with authority - not an authority of his own but the authority of his king. When he spoke representing his

king, it was not his own word that he spoke, but the word of the king.

Calvin's comment on 2 Cor.5:20 ("We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us"), is worth quoting on this point: "This is of no small importance for giving authority to the embassy; nay more, it is absolutely necessary, for who would rest upon the testimony of men in reference to his external salvation? It is a matter of too much importance to allow our resting contented with the promise of men without feeling assured that they are ordained by God and that God speaks to us by them".

A man is called to the ministry of the Word of God by an inward call of God and by the recognition and call of the church. If he is not called, he is not preaching God's Word, though his doctrine is Scriptural.

(To be continued).

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Reflecting on the period of over 300 years during which the Christian church suffered terrible persecution at the hands of the Roman emperors, the following extract from Foxe's Book of Martyrs is most significant:

"I doubt not, good reader, but thou dost right well consider with thyself the marvellous working of God's mighty power; to see so many emperors confederate together against the Lord and His anointed, who, having the subjection of the whole world under their dominion, did bend their whole might and devices to extirpate the name of Christ, and all Christians. Wherein, if the power of man could have prevailed, what could they not do? or what could they do more than they did? If policy or devices could have served, what policy was there lacking? If torments or pains of death could have helped, what cruelty of torment by man could be invented which was not attempted? If laws, edicts, proclamations, written not only in tables, but engraven in brass, could have stood, all this was practised against the weak Christians. And yet, notwithstanding, to see how no counsel can stand against the Lord, note how all these be gone, and yet Christ and his Church doth stand."

## POPERY - THE PRESENT TRENDS

The heads of the Papacy and the Anglican church long ago embraced and kissed. The heads of the Papacy and the Eastern Orthodox Church have more recently done the same. Heads of Communist (atheist) countries have been received in audience by the Pope. The late Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. Ramsey) said he expected to meet atheists in heaven. The Vatican Secretariat for dialogue with non-christian religions has fraternised with Buddhists, Hindus, etc. The World Council of Churches has held many meetings for "united" worship with such non-christian religions. One such meeting at Westminster Abbey was attended by H.M. the Queen. The Papacy is one evil among many - albeit one of the most powerful.

All these various "faiths" emanate from Babylon - "the mother of the harlots and abominations of the earth". When the whole evil brood are gathered again under the government of the mother, then we shall see the exact fulfilment of 2 Thess.2. Then the Satanists, now much in the background, who glorify the grossest of sins in their worship. will come right to the front and the whole world will worship the Dragon ("that old serpent called the Devil and Satan - Rev. 12:9 and 13.4) and those who will not, will be martyred (Rev.13:15-18).

Then will be fulfilled Isaiah 42:13-15 and similar Scriptures. Then our Lord, having waited in patience at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens for His enemies to be made His footstool, will take unto Him His great power and reign (Rev.11:17).

Popery in the abstract sense is seen in all these false faiths as in all the present-day cults. The leader of each is a "pope" in his own particular sphere.

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The above article was written by Mr. James Payne and appeared in the magazine "Peace & Truth" and is reprinted by kind permission.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS and INFORMATION

### Lord's Day Observance Society

We were very glad to have for the first time, a visit from Mr J. G. Roberts, the General Secretary of the Society. He gave us a first hand account of the work of the Society in maintaining a witness to the Trust of God relative to the Christian Sunday and also the constant vigilance in monitoring movements whose aim it is to erode the Sabbath. We need to keep this Society and its Officers very much in our prayers.

### Trinitarian Bible Society

Un Saturday 23rd August, Mr. Kenneth Dix, representing the Society was able to tell us of the work and progress over the past year, not only in the distribution of the scriptures but also of continued pioneer work in translation. He also spoke on Acts 13 and 14, pointing out that what brought about striking change of events was the preaching of the Word by just two men. Mr. Dix also conducted the services on the following Lord's day.

### Work of Visitation.

For some time now Mr. Bennett and Mr. Potter have had laid on their hearts, the need for personal visitation of the elderly confined through infirmity and sickness to their homes, local hospitals and nursing homes, as part of the pastoral work of the church. Wherever possible the Scriptures are read and prayers offered. Several new contacts have been made; some are very lonely and are grateful just to have a visit.

### Obituary.

On Monday 25th August the Lord called home our beloved sister Mrs. Howells. She was 92 years of age and although failing in health for oome time, had, until recently been regularly in attendance with us at the Chapel services. She was a shining example and although her life had been beset with much sorrow and many trials, yet, her faith was evident in her godly life. We shall miss her presence very much.

Please note the following dates:

Thursday 30th October - 7.45 pm. Mr. F. Stanbury will (D.V.) continue his series of addresses on the Life of Abraham.

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"REMEMBER THEM ... WHO HAVE SPOKEN UNTO YOU THE  
WORD OF GOD: WHOSE FAITH FOLLOW ... (Hebrews 13:7)

The passing of our esteemed brother Mr Nethercott has left a large gap in our ranks. For almost 60 years he had been associated with North Road Chapel and throughout this long period he has been marked by outstanding fidelity. He has been an Elder of this church for 50 years and he was present at the Elders' meeting just one month before his death. In this capacity he was a man of wise and godly counsel and a shining example to all. For over 40 years he acted as church secretary and was meticulous in all his duties. Above all he had great knowledge of the Word of God and ministered with grace and power.

Many of us at North Road look back over a long association with our dear brother and our feelings are expressed in the language of Proverbs 10:7 - "THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED".

His funeral took place on Thursday 12th June and although a sad occasion, yet it was marked by a spirit of thanksgiving and triumph. We assure our beloved sister Mrs. Nethercott and all the family of the continuance of our love and prayers.