Words to Winners of Souls

A Pastor's Burden for Pastors

Horatius Bonar

21st Century Edition

Preface

This short book was produced by Dr Horatius Bonar after more than four and a half decades in the ministry in the year 1877. The book *Horatius Bonar, D.D.: A Memorial.* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1889) informs us briefly of the beginnings of his labours at Leith, the thirty odd years at Kelso and the last decades of ministry in Edinburgh occupying the famous pulpit of the Chalmers Memorial Church.

What is not so readily evident is the tumultuous course of that ministry. His early years in the ministry were full of conflict for the rights of Christ over his Church. In the Disruption of 1843, with four hundred and fifty other evangelicals, Bonar left the Church of Scotland, and the Free Church of Scotland was formed. It was a massive shake-up for all Scotland. Soon there were the challenges of training ministers in a new institution and the future of the religious life of the Scottish nation. This book is a distillation of acute observations after faithful, long and hard service and is free from denominationalism. Over these years, Bonar's keen soul had seen many professional ministers preach countless useless sermons and perform numberless ministerial tasks. It was not that the sermons were badly prepared or preached, nor was their content heterodox and anti-evangelical. They were bathed in a professional casualness that is so offensive to God (see for example Isaiah 1v10ff) and so unlike the ministry of our Saviour, his apostles and prophets. This same stupor marked other ministerial duties.

This moved Bonar's soul to a deep indignation. The result is a classic book whose chapters do not make for neat and easy reading. In many ways the composition and language evidence a roughness, borne of a soul weighed down by the urgency of the his burden. Thus, these five chapters bear the hallmarks of great preaching; there are vivid illustrations as he drives his point into the souls of men who will give a stricter account to God.

Read this book carefully: Bonar may at times appear to be fanatical. It is not so. For example, his view of a 'Soul Winner' is not a crafty so-called evangelist who persuades folk to decisions. Rather, a careful reading reveals that the Lord's sheep are converted and fed by the same urgent gospel zeal. Souls that are won to Christ are kept in Christ by pastors who love and imitate their Saviour. **Read this book, read to the eternal profit** of your soul, your own duty to repentance and faith, to the inflaming of true prayer for the coming of God's Kingdom.

Chapter 1

The Necessity for True Ministers: A Life of Service to God

How much more would a few good and fervent ministers produce in service to God than a multitude of lukewarm ones!

We ought to listen to Oecolampadius, the Swiss Reformer, in our churches today. The mere presence of more and more men who call themselves 'ministers of Christ' hardly does any good. They may just be 'users of the soil' like the fruitless fig-tree that the Lord describes in his parable (Luke 13:7). They might be like Achan, who cursed and troubled the camp of Israel (Joshua 6:18). They might even bring God's terrible storm as Jonah did (Jonah 1:4). Even though they claim to believe and teach the truth, by faithlessness, lukewarmness and lazy formality, they damage the cause of Christ irreparably. They freeze and wither all spiritual life around them. Lukewarm, Bible-believing' ministers are much more fatally destructive to souls than those who are grossly inconsistent or flagrantly heretical. "What man on earth is so pernicious a drone as an idle minister?" said Cecil.; and Fletcher incisively remarked that "lukewarm pastors made careless Christians." How can multiplication of this type of minister, however great, be counted a blessing?

Only when the church of Christ returns to her first calling and walks in apostolic footsteps, seeks to be conformed more closely to inspired models and allows nothing earthly to come between her and her living Head, will she properly ensure that the men to whom she entrusts the care of souls, however learned and able, should be more distinguished by their spirituality, zeal, faith and love.

Burning Sincerity

"Baxter would have set the world on fire while Orton was lighting a match." Richard Baxter's biographer compared him to Job Ortan, who lived and worked in Kidderminster a century later. How true! Yet not true of these two only. They represent two classes in the church of Christ in every age and of every denomination. The numerous 'Ortans' you may count by hundreds, the 'Baxters'

by tens; yet who would not prefer a solitary specimen of the one to a thousand of the other? “When he spoke of weighty soul concerns,” says one of Baxter’s colleagues, “you might find his very spirit drenched in them.” No wonder that he was blessed with such amazing success! Men felt that in listening to him they were in contact with one who was dealing with realities of infinite weight.

This is one of the secrets of ministerial strength and ministerial success. How much of the overflowing faithlessness of this day is due, not so much to the lack of spiritual instructors nor the grossly unfaithful and inconsistent ones, but to the coldness of many who are regarded as sound and faithful. Clearly, if religion is worth anything, it is worth everything; if it calls for any zeal and warmth, it must be the highest degrees of these! There can never be a compromise between reckless atheism and the intense warmth of religious zeal. Men may dislike, detest, scoff at and persecute the latter, yet their consciences constantly remind them that if there is a God and a Saviour, a heaven and a hell, then anything less than such a life and such a warm love is hypocrisy, dishonesty and perjury!

Thus, the lesson people learn from the lifeless sermons of these lukewarm ministers is that, since these men do not believe the doctrines that they preach, there is no need for the hearers to do so either. If ministers only ‘believe’ the truth because they make their living by doing so, why should those who make nothing take any trouble over it? “Rash preaching,” said Rowland Hill, “disgusts; timid preaching leaves poor souls fast asleep; bold preaching is the only preaching that is owned by God.”

It is not only flawed faith, neglect of duty, or obvious hypocrisy that destroys the work of Christian ministry and ruins souls. A man may be free from all scandal in life and doctrine, and yet may be the most appalling barrier to all spiritual good for his congregation. He may be a dry and empty cistern, even though he is orthodox and Bible-believing. He may utterly destroy spiritual life at the very time he is speaking of the way of life. He may repel men from the cross even when he preaches it. He may stand between his flock and God’s blessing even when he is lifting up his hand to bless them. The same words that from warm lips should drop like rain or distil like dew, fall from his lips as snow or hail and chill all spiritual warmth and blight all spiritual life. How many souls have been lost for lack of earnestness, solemnity and love in the preacher, even when the words uttered were precious and true!

Our One Object: To Win Souls

We take for granted that the object of the Christian ministry is to convert sinners and to edify the body of Christ. No faithful minister can possibly rest short of this. Applause, fame, popularity, honour, wealth - all these are vain. If souls are not won, if saints are not matured, our ministry itself is vain.

The question, therefore, that each of us has to answer to his own conscience is, "Has it been the goal of my ministry, has it been the desire of my heart, to save the lost and guide the saved? Is this my aim in every sermon I preach, in every visit I pay? Is it under the influence of this conviction that I continually live and walk and speak? Is it for this I pray and toil and fast and weep? Is it for this I spend and am spent, counting it, next to the salvation of my own soul, my highest joy to be an instrument in saving others? Is it for this that I exist? Would I gladly die in order to accomplish this? Have I seen the pleasure of the Lord prospering in my hand? Have I seen souls converted under my ministry? Have God's people found nourishment from my lips and gone upon their way rejoicing? Or, have I seen no fruit of my labours, but I am content to remain fruitless? Am I satisfied to preach, and yet not know of one saving impression made, one sinner awakened?"

Nothing short of positive success can satisfy a *true* minister of Christ. His plans may go well, and his daily duties may proceed steadily, but without actual fruit in the saving of souls he counts all these as nothing. His longing is: "My little children, for whom I am again in labour pains until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). And it is this trepidation that makes him successful.

"Ministers are seldom honoured with success unless they are continually aiming at the conversion of sinners," observed John Owen. The resolution that, in the strength and with the blessing of God, he will never rest without success will ensure it. The man who resolves to confront every difficulty, who counts the cost and fixes his eye upon the prize and is determined to fight his way to it, is the man that conquers. The dull apathy of other days is gone. He senses that Satan has actively entered the battle and it is best to meet him head-on. He is aware when men's consciences are really on edge as God seems to strive with them as before the flood. He is alert to a breath of the Divine Spirit that passes over the earth and the momentous character of the time, as well as the necessity for improving it so long as it lasts.

The one true goal or resting-place where doubt and weariness, the stings of an accusing conscience and the longings of an unsatisfied soul will all be quieted is Christ himself. Not the church, but Christ. Not doctrine, but Christ. Not forms, but Christ. Not ceremonies, but Christ. Christ who is the God-man, giving his life for ours, sealing the everlasting covenant, and making peace for us through the blood of his cross. Christ the divine storehouse of all light and truth, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). Christ the infinite vessel, filled with the Holy Spirit – who is the Enlightener, Teacher, Life-giver, Comforter – so that "of his fullness have all we received grace upon grace" (John 1:16). This, this alone, is the vexed soul's refuge, its rock to build on, its home to abide in, until the great tempter be bound, and every conflict ended in victory.

We Must Oppose "Opinion" with Truth

Let us, then, expose this 'earnestness' which is now the boast, but may soon be the curse of the age. The gospel of the grace of God alone can bring down its racing pulse and bring peace and calm:. All other things are just opiates, drugs, and quackeries. The gospel is the divine medicine, the only, speedy, eternal cure. It is not by opinion that we are to answer opinions, but it is the truth of God that we wield. We apply the edge of the "sword of the Spirit" to mere human theories; we make them see what a web of sophistry and folly they have woven to their entanglement and ruin.

It is not opinions that man needs: it is Truth. It is not theology: it is God. It is not religion: it is Christ. It is not literature and science, but the knowledge of the free love of God in the gift of his only-begotten Son. Richard Baxter wrote:

> "I know not what others think, but for my own part I am ashamed of my stupidity, and wonder at myself that I deal not with my own and others' souls as one that looks for the great day of the Lord; and that I can have room for almost any other thoughts and words, and that such astonishing matters do not wholly absorb my mind. I marvel how I can preach of them slightly and coldly; and how I can let men alone in their sins; and that I do not go to them, and beseech them, for the Lord's sake, to repent—however they may take it, and whatever pain and trouble it should cost me.
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> "I seldom come out of the pulpit but my conscience smiteth me that I have been no more serious and fervent. It accuseth me not so much for want of

ornaments and elegancy, nor for letting fall an unhandsome word; but it asketh me, 'How couldst thou speak of life and death with such a heart? How couldst thou preach of heaven and hell in such a careless, sleepy manner? Dost thou believe what thou sayest? Art thou in earnest, or in jest? How canst thou tell people that sin is such a thing, and that so much misery is upon them and before them, and be no more affected with it? Shouldst thou not weep over such a people, and should not thy tears interrupt thy words? Shouldst thou not cry aloud and show them their transgressions, and entreat and beseech them as for life and death?'

"Truly this is the peal that conscience doth ring in my ears, and yet my drowsy soul will not be awakened. Oh, what a thing is an insensible, hardened heart! O Lord, save us from the plague of infidelity and hardheartedness ourselves, or else how shall we be fit instruments of saving others from it? Oh, do that on our souls which Thou wouldst use us to do on the souls of others!"

Chapter 2

The Minister's Life and Walk

Saved and Sanctified

The true minister must be a true Christian. He must be called by God before he can call others to God. Paul states the matter: "God...has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). They were *first* reconciled and then they were given the ministry of reconciliation. Are we ministers reconciled? It is only reasonable that a man who is a spiritual guide to others should himself know the way of salvation. It has been frequently said that "the way to heaven is blocked up with dead professors!" It is also true that this miserable obstruction is not only composed of church members; let us take heed unto ourselves! As the minister's life is in

more than one respect the 'life of a ministry,' let us consider ministerial holy living.

Let us seek the Lord early. "If my heart be early seasoned with his presence, it will savour of him all day after." Let us see God before man every day. McCheyne said:

> I ought to pray before seeing anyone. Often when I sleep long, or meet with others early, and then have family prayer and breakfast and forenoon callers, it is eleven or twelve o'clock before I begin secret prayer. This is a wretched system. It is unscriptural. Christ rose before daybreak and went into a solitary place. Family prayer loses much of power and sweetness, and I can do no good to those who come to seek for me. The conscience feels guilty, the soul unfed, the lamp not trimmed. Then, when secret prayer comes, the soul is often out of tune. I feel it far better to begin with God, to see his face first, to get my soul near him before it is near another. It is best to have at least one hour alone with God before engaging in anything else. At the same time, I must be careful not to reckon communion with God by minutes or hours, or by solitude.

Hear this true servant of Christ exhorting a beloved brother:

> Take heed to yourself; your own soul is your first and greatest care. You know a sound body alone can work with power, much more a healthy soul. Keep a clear conscience through the blood of the Lamb. Keep up close communion with God. Study likeness to him in all things. Read the Bible for your *own* growth first, then for your people.

"With him," says his biographer, "the commencement of all labour invariably consisted in the preparation of his own soul. The forerunner of each day's visitations was a calm season of private devotion during morning hours. The walls of his chamber were witnesses of his prayerfulness—I believe of his tears as well as of his cries. The pleasant sound of psalms often issued from his room at an early hour; then followed the reading of the Word for his own sanctification. And few have so fully realized the blessing of the first psalm."

Oh, that this were true of us all! "Devotion," said Bishop Hall, "is the life of religion, the very soul of piety, the highest employment of grace." It is much to be feared that we are weak in the pulpit because we are weak in the closet.

Walking with God

"To restore a commonplace truth," writes Mr. Coleridge, "to its first uncommon lustre, you need only translate it into action." *'Walking with God'* is a very commonplace truth. Translate this truth into action: how radiant it becomes! The phrase is clichéd!, but the activity, how rare! It is such a walk, not an abstract ideal but a personality, a life, which the reader is invited to contemplate. Oh, that we would only set ourselves in right earnest to this rare work of transformation!

It is said of the energetic, pious and successful John Berridge that "communion with God was what he enforced in the latter stages of his ministry. It was, indeed, his own meat and drink, and the banquet from which he never appeared to rise." This shows us the source of his great strength. If we were always sitting at this banquet, then it might be recorded of us before long, as it was of him, "He was in the first year visited by about a thousand persons under serious impressions."

Study the Speakers, Not the Sermons

"Where did their success come from?" you may well ask. " Why, may not the same success be ours?" We point you to the men more than to their doctrine. We may study and imitate the sermons of Whitefield or Berridge or Edwards, but it is the men themselves that we must first consider. We must be saturated with their heart-devotion more than with their writings if we wish to produce a ministry as powerful and victorious as theirs. They were spiritual men and walked with God. It is living fellowship with a living Saviour, transforming us into his image, that makes us capable and successful ministers of the gospel.

Orthodoxy, learning, eloquence, power of argument, zeal, fervour and any other excellence will accomplish nothing without communion with Christ. It is this that gives power to our words and persuasiveness to our arguments, making them either as the balm of Gilead to the wounded spirit or as sharp arrows of the mighty to the conscience of the stout-hearted rebel. A blessed fragrance, a virtue, seems to surround those who walk with God in holy, happy communion wherever they go. Nearness to him, intimacy with him, being conformed to his character are essential elements of a ministry of power.

When we can tell our people: "We have seen his glory and so we speak of him, not by a report but because we have seen the King in his beauty," what a vantage point we occupy! Our power to draw folk to Christ comes chiefly from the

fullness of our personal joy and close communion with him. The face that reflects most of Christ and shines most with his love and grace is best suited to attract the gaze of a careless, giddy world, and win restless souls from the fascinations of creature-love and creature-beauty. A ministry of power can only be the fruit of a holy, peaceful and loving closeness to the Lord.

Faithfulness: Essential to Success

"True instruction was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity and turned many away from iniquity." Malachi 2:6

We must appreciate the connection here between faithfulness and success in the work of the ministry; between a godly life and the "turning away many from iniquity." The reason we first took office, as we declared at ordination, was the saving of souls; we still live and labour for the same purpose. The means to this end are a holy life and a faithful fulfilment of our ministry. The connection between these things is close and sure; we can count upon it. We are called upon to pray and labour with the confident expectation of its being realized; and where it is not, to examine ourselves with all diligence, lest the cause of the failure be found in ourselves: in our lack of faith, love, prayer, zeal, warmth, spirituality and holiness of life. Where these are absent, the Holy Spirit is grieved away (Ephesians 4:30). Success is attainable; success is desirable; success is promised by God. Nothing on earth can be more bitter to the soul of a faithful minister than the absence of it. To walk with God, and to be faithful to our trust, is declared to be the certain way of attaining it. Oh, how much depends on the holiness of our life, the consistency of our character, the heavenliness of our walk and conversation!

Our position is such that we cannot remain neutral. Our life-work cannot be one of harmless obscurity. We must either repel or attract, save or ruin souls! How loud, then, the call, how strong the motive to spirituality of soul and circumspectness of life! How solemn the warning against worldly-mindedness and vanity, against levity and frivolity, against negligence, sloth, and cold formality!

The minister of Christ is called to walk with God more than any other. Everything depends on this: his peace and joy, his future reward at the coming

of the Lord. God specifically points to this as the true and sure way of securing the blessing. This is the grand secret of ministerial success: One who walks with God reflects the light of his countenance upon a dark world; the closer he walks, the more of this light he reflects. The minister who walks with God carries in his existence and on his face such calmness and holy joy that he ever brings God's peace. One who walks with God receives and imparts life wherever he goes; out of him "shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). He is not merely the world's light, but the world's fountain: dispensing the water of life on every side and making the barren desert blossom like a rose. He waters the world's wilderness as he moves along his peaceful course. His life is blessed; his example is blessed; his dealings are blessed; his words are blessed; his ministry is blessed! Souls are saved, sinners are converted, and many are turned from their iniquity.

Chapter 3

Past Defects

"O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to you,... O our God, what shall we say after this?" Ezra 9:6,10

Dangers of Ministerial Professionalism

Preaching each Lord's Day, visiting those who request it, attending meetings, administering the Lord's Supper diligently - this, we fear, sums up the ministerial life of multitudes who are 'overseers of the flock of Christ' by profession. A ministry of thirty, forty or fifty years often yields nothing more than so many sermons, sacraments, visits, and meetings recorded in the church's records. This is the TOTAL of a lifetime of ministry to many! But, no record of souls that have been saved can be made.

Multitudes have perished under such a ministry; the Judgment only will disclose whether so much as one has been saved. There might be learning, but there was no "tongue of the learned to speak a word in season to him that is weary" (Isaiah 50:4). There might be wisdom, but it certainly was not the wisdom that "wins souls" (Proverbs 11:30). There might even be the 'sound' of the gospel, but it seemed to contain no good news at all; it was not sounded forth from warm lips into startled ears as the message of eternal life, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1Timothy 1:11). Men lived, but it was never asked of them by their minister whether they were born again! Men sickened, sent for the minister, and received a prayer upon their deathbeds as their 'passport into heaven.' Men died and were buried with all their fathers' remains. There were prayers at their funerals and decent respects to their dead bodies. Yet their souls went up to the judgment seat without being cared-for. No-one, not even the minister who had promised to watch over them, said to them, "Are you ready?" No-one warned them to flee from the wrath to come.

Is this not all too true of many a church and many a minister? We do not speak in anger or scorn, we just ask the question solemnly and earnestly. It needs an answer. If ever there was a time when there should be great searching of heart and acknowledgment of unfaithfulness, it is now when God is active in judgment and in mercy. We speak in brotherly kindness. Surely the answer should not be of wrath and bitterness. If this description is true, what sin must there be in ministers and people! How great must be the spiritual desolation that prevails and how grievously wrong is such a case. This calls for solemn self-examination in every minister and requires deep repentance.

The Tragedy of a Barren Ministry

Fields are ploughed and sown but produce no fruit! Machines run constantly but nothing is made! Nets are cast into the sea and spread wide, yet no fish are caught! All this lasts for years, for a lifetime! How strange! Yet it is true; there is no speculation nor exaggeration in the matter. Many ministers have no other account to give. They tell you of sermons preached but say nothing of sermons blessed. They speak of sermons that were admired and praised but none that have been made effectual by the Holy Spirit. They can tell you how many have been baptised, how many communicants admitted, but of souls awakened, converted, ripening in grace, they can give no account. They can enumerate the sacraments

they have administered but not of times of refreshing and awakening (Acts 3:19). They can tell you of all the cases of discipline that have passed through their hands, but not of the godly sorrow and fruits of repentance of those 'penitents' whom they absolved and restored (cf 1 Corinthians 6:11). They never agave thought to such an issue!

Ministers can report the attendance at Sunday school and the abilities of the teachers. Yet, they are unaware of any these precious little ones, whom they have vowed to feed, seeking the Lord and whether the teachers be prayerful and godly. They can tell you all about their towns, the number and the outward condition of the members of the congregation, yet as to their spiritual state and how many have been awakened from the sleep of death to follow God they have no idea. Some think it foolish and presumptuous, if not fanatical, to ask about this, though they have sworn, before men and angels, to watch over these souls for which they must give account! But oh, of what use are sermons, sacraments, schools, if souls are left to perish and true godliness is lost, and the Holy Spirit is not sought? People are left to grow up and die unpitied, unprayed-for, unwarned!

For God's Glory and Man's Good

It was not always this way. Our fathers really watched and preached for souls. They asked, and they expected, a blessing. Nor were they denied it. They were blessed in turning many to righteousness; their lives record their successful labours. How refreshing the lives of those who lived only for the glory of God and the good of souls. There is something in their history that compels us to feel that they were ministers of Christ, true watchmen.

How cheering to read of Baxter and his work at Kidderminster! How solemn to hear of Venn and his preaching, so that it was said that men "fell before him like slaked lime"! And in the blessed labours of that man of God, the apostolic Whitefield, is there not much to humble us, as well as to stimulate? We read of Tanner, who was himself awakened under Whitefield, that he "seldom preached one sermon in vain." We are told of the missions of Berridge and Hicks throughout England, who were blessed in one year to awaken four thousand souls. Oh, for these days again! Oh, for one day of Whitefield again!

Someone has written:

> The language we have been accustomed to adopting is this; we just use

> the means and leave the event to God; we can do no more than employ the means; this is our duty and having done this we must leave the rest to him who is the disposer of all things.

Such language sounds good, it seems to acknowledge our nothingness and submit to God's sovereignty. *But it is only noise!, there is no substance in it, for though there is truth stamped on the face of it, there is falsehood at the root of it*. To talk of submission to God's sovereignty is one thing, but really to submit to it is another and quite different thing.

Submission Involves Surrender of Our Own Will

True submission to God's sovereign disposal always requires the abandonment of our own will in the matter concerned. This is never produced without the soul undergoing most severe and humbling testing. As long as we are satisfied by an outward 'correctness', which costs us nothing, and think that we are leave everything to God, we deceive ourselves, and the truth in this matter is not in us. No, to truly give anything to God implies that the will, which is emphatically the heart, has been set on that thing. If the heart has indeed been set on the salvation of sinners as it goal we possibly pursue without out heart being severely exercised and deeply pained by the surrender of our own will. So, if we are quietly content to use the means for saving souls without seeing them saved thereby, it is because there is no renunciation of the will and no real surrender to God. The fact is, the will had never really been set upon this goal; if it had, it could not possibly give-up without being broken by the sacrifice.

When we are satisfied with outward correctness without obtaining our goal, and then to say that we were submitting to the Lord's will, we use a truth to hide a lie. This is exactly what formalists do when they perform only outward religious duties. They know these duties will not save them and they are warned of their danger and they are urged to seek the Lord with all the heart. Yet, they reply that they know they must repent and believe, but that they cannot do either the one or the other of themselves, and that they must wait till God gives them grace to do so. Now, this is true when considered just by itself, but we can see that they are using it as a lie to cover and excuse their insincerity of heart. Obviously, if their hearts were really set upon salvation, they could not rest satisfied without it. They are content, not because of heart-submission to God, but because of hardened indifference to the salvation of their own souls.

Covering Falsehood with Truth

It is exactly the same for us as ministers. When we are satisfied with using the means for saving souls, without seeing them really saved or broken-hearted, but quietly talk of 'leaving matters to God's disposal', we make use of a truth to cover and excuse a lie. Our ability to leave the matter thus is not, as we imagine, the result of heart-submission to God, but of heart-indifference to the salvation of the souls we deal with. No, if the heart is really set on this goal, it must gain it or break in losing it. The Lord who saved us has taught us to weep over the unsaved. O Lord let that mind be in us that was in you! Give us your tears to weep; for, Lord, our hearts are hard toward our fellows. We can see thousands perish around us and our sleep never be disturbed: no vision of their awful doom ever scaring us, no cry from their lost souls ever turning our peace into bitterness.

Our families, congregations, and schools, even our cities, land and world, must send us daily to our knees. For the loss of even one soul is terrible beyond conception - eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered the heart of man, what a soul in hell must suffer forever. Lord, give us heartfelt compassion! "What a mystery! The soul and eternity of one man depends upon the voice of another!"

Chapter 4

Ministerial Confession

"Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come quickly to you, and I will remove your candlestick out of its place, unless you repent." Revelation 2:5

Ministerial Confession of the Church of Scotland

In1651 the Church of Scotland stated of her ministers: "how deep their hand was

in the transgression, and that ministers had no small accession to the drawing on of the judgments that were upon the land." They drew up what they called 'A humble acknowledgment of the sins of the ministry.' This document is striking and searching, perhaps one of the fullest, most faithful, and most impartial confessions of ministerial sin ever made. A few extracts from it may be found in the Appendix at the back of this book.

These are solemn confessions—the confessions of men who knew the nature of the ministry to which they had entered, and who desired to please God who had called them, so that they might give an account with joy and not with grief.

Confessing Our Shortcomings

Let us, as they did, deal honestly with ourselves before God. Our confessions ought to be no less full and heart-searching:

1) We have been unfaithful.

The fear of man and the love of his approval has often made us afraid. We have been unfaithful to our own souls, our flocks and our brethren – in preaching, visitation, discipline, and in the church. In performing the duties of our calling, there has been grievous unfaithfulness. Instead of specifically identifying the sin rebuked, we have used vague allusion. Instead of bold reproof, there has been a timid hint. Instead of uncompromising condemnation, there has been feeble disapproval. Instead of the unswerving consistency of a holy life (which should be a protest against the world and a rebuke of sin) there has been evident unfaithfulness in our attitudes and conversations, in our daily behaviour and dealing with others. So much so, that any faithfulness we have shown on the Lord's Day is all but nullified by the lack of holy living in the week.

Consider James Ussher, the 17th century Archbishop of Armagh. Few men ever lived a life so busy and so devoted to God; his studies, daily habits, position, and friends kept his hands full at every moment. Even then, he seemed continually to hear a voice saying: 'Redeem the time, for the days are evil' (Ephesians 5:16). This was true when at the age of ten he was converted by a sermon preached on Romans 12:1: "I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service." He was a painstaking, laborious preacher of the Word for fifty-five years. *Yet hear him on his deathbed!* How he clings to Christ's righteousness

alone, and sees in himself, even after such a life, only sin and shortcomings. The last words he was heard to utter were about one o'clock in the afternoon, and these words were uttered in a loud voice: "But, Lord, in special forgive me my sins of omission."

Though he was never known to waste an hour, he begged God to forgive his sins of neglect and omissions with his most fervent last breath, says his biographer. He used the shred-ends of his life for his great Lord and Master! The very day he fell sick for the last time, he rose up from writing one of his great works and went out to visit a sick woman, to whom he spoke so properly and fully that you would have taken him to have spoken of heaven before he came there. Yet this man was weighed down with the guilt of his neglects! Reader, what think you of yourself? What about your neglected duties, wasted hours, failed times of prayer, shrinking from unpleasant work and delegating it to others? How can you be content to sit under your vine and fig tree without exerting yourself for the souls of others? "Lord, in special forgive me my sins of omission!"

Hear the confession of Jonathan Edwards, in regard both to personal and ministerial sins:

> Often I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness; very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping, sometimes for a considerable time together, so that I have often been forced to shut myself up. I have had a vastly greater sense of my own wickedness, and the badness of my heart, than ever I had before my conversion. My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, swallowing up all thought and imagination. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite. When I look into my heart and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell. And yet it seems to me that my conviction of sin is exceedingly small and faint: it is enough to amaze me that I have no more sense of my sin. I have greatly longed of late for a broken heart, and to lie low before God.

2) We have been carnal and unspiritual.

The whole tenor of our life has been low and earthly. We associate too much and too intimately with the world, we have become accustomed to its ways. Hence our godly appetites have been blighted, our consciences blunted, and that

sensitivity to sin, which does not turn back from suffering but shrinks from even the appearance of sin, has worn off. Callousness, of which we believed ourselves incapable, has come in. "Our want of usefulness is much oftener to be ascribed to our want of spirituality than to any want of natural ability," said Fuller. Urquhart adds: "I see that spirituality of mind is the main qualification for the work of the ministry."

Perhaps we might remember when we had holy ambitions that were fixed beyond this world; by contrast our present state reveals shocking and painful changes. There are further causes of this deterioration in our spirituality, beyond our love of this world. We study truth as abstract dogma without devotion, so that it is robbed of its freshness and power. We are familiar with the routines of the work of ministry and suffer from formality and coldness. Busy about the most solemn duties of our office, counselling souls in private about their immortal welfare, leading the worship of God's assembled people, administering the sacraments, we are often all but prayerless and faithless. We sink into a grievous neglect of the profound reverence and godly fear which ever ought to possess and pervade us. How truly, and with what emphasis, we may say: "I am carnal, sold under sin" (Romans 7:14). The world has not been crucified to us, because we are not crucified to it; our flesh, with its members, has not been mortified (Galatians 6:14; Romans 8:13). What a sad effect all this has had, not only upon our peace of soul, on our growth in grace, but upon the success of our ministry!

3) We have been selfish.

We shrink back from hard work, difficulties and endurance because we count our lives too precious; instead we pursue ease and comfort. Thus, we seek to please ourselves in place of obeying Romans 15:2: "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification." We have not borne "one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). We have been worldly and covetous. We have not presented ourselves to God as "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1), laying ourselves, our lives, our substance, our time, our strength, our faculties, our all, upon his altar. We have completely lost sight of this self-sacrificing principle on which as Christians and much more as ministers we are called upon to act. We have had little idea of anything like sacrifice at all. We go right up to the point where a sacrifice is demanded, but there we stand

thinking it unnecessary, imprudent and ill-advised to go further. Yet ought not the life of every Christian, especially of every minister, be a life of self-sacrifice and self-denial throughout, even as was the life of him who "pleased not himself " (Romans 15:13)?

4) We have been lazy.

We have spared ourselves hard work and have not endured hardships as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Though we have been ready in season, we have not been so out of season; we have not gathered up the fragments of our time so that not a moment might be thrown idly or unprofitably away. Precious hours and days have been wasted in sloth, enjoying company, pleasure, idle and aimless reading, which ought to have been devoted to prayer, study, sermon preparation and meeting with God's people! Indolence, self-indulgence, and fickleness are like a destructive cancer to the ministry, arresting the blessing and marring our success.

It cannot be said of us, "For my name's sake, you have persevered and endured hardships and have not grown weary" (Revelation 2:3). Alas! we have fainted and grown "weary in well-doing" (Galatians 6:9). We have not made conscience of our work. We have not dealt honestly with the church to whom we swore the vows of ordination. We have even dealt deceitfully with God, whose servants we profess to be. We have manifested but little of the unwearied, self-denying love with which, as shepherds, we ought to have watched over the flocks committed to our care. We have fed ourselves, and not the flock.

Hear Richard Baxter's defence of his ministerial duties, in answer to enemies who taunted him with idleness:

> The worst I wish you is that you had my ease instead of your labour. I have reason to take myself for the least of all saints, and yet I fear not to tell the accuser that I take the labour of most tradesmen in the town to be a pleasure to the body in comparison with mine, though I would not exchange it with the greatest prince. Their labour preserveth health, and mine consumeth it; they work in ease, and I in continual pain; they have hours and days of recreations, I have scarce time to eat and drink. Nobody molesteth them for their labour, but the more I do the more hatred and trouble I draw upon me.

This is spending and being spent (2 Corinthians 12:15); this is an example

worthy of imitation.

5) We have been cold.

Even when we are diligent how little warmth we shed! The whole soul is not poured into our duties, and too often we exude the repulsive air of formality and routine. We do not speak and act like men in earnest. At times our words are feeble, even when right and true. At others, our manner is careless even though our words are weighty, and our tone betrays the apathy which our words and demeanour try to hide. Love is absent: deep love, love strong as death that made Jeremiah weep in secret places for the pride of Israel. Paul speaks of "even weeping" for the enemies of the cross of Christ. Preaching, visiting, counselling and reproving exhibit formality and coldness but precious little tenderness and affection! "Oh, that I was all heart," said Rowland Hill, "and soul, and spirit, to tell the glorious gospel of Christ to perishing multitudes!"

6) We have been cowards.

Fear has often led us to smooth down and generalise truths that would have brought hatred and reproach if we had stated them fully. We have failed to declare to our people the whole counsel of God; we have shrunk from reproving, rebuking, and exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine. We have feared to offend friends, or to awaken the wrath of enemies. We preach the Law poorly and feebly so that the free gospel has been vague, uncertain, and timorous. We are greatly deficient in that majestic boldness and nobility of spirit which peculiarly marked Luther, Calvin, Knox, and the mighty men of the Reformation. Of Luther it was said: "Every word was a thunderbolt."

7) We lack solemnity.

When we read the lives of Howe, Baxter, Brainerd or Edwards, we are in company with men whose apostolic manner was serious and weighty. We know that these men bore weight with them in their words and lives. We see also the contrast between ourselves and them in respect of that deep solemn manner which made others aware that they walked with God. We ought to be deeply ashamed of our light-hearted, superficial, carefree, empty, foolish talking and joking. It causes terrible injury to souls, hinders the progress of God's saints and by its love of the world it does no good to the same world dying in sin.

8) We have preached ourselves, not Christ.

We have sought applause, courted honour, desired fame and been jealous of our

reputations. We have preached too often so as to exalt ourselves instead of magnifying Christ, so as to draw men's eyes to ourselves instead of fixing them on him and his cross. Have we not often preached Christ for the very purpose of getting honour to ourselves? Christ, in the sufferings of his first coming and the glory of his second, has not been the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, of all our sermons.

9) We have used words of man's wisdom.

We have forgotten Paul's resolution to avoid the enticing words of man's wisdom, lest he should make the cross of Christ of none effect (1 Corinthians 1:17). We have reversed his reasoning as well as his resolution, and acted as if by well-studied, well-polished, well-reasoned discourses, we could so gild and beautify the cross as to make it no longer repulsive, but irresistibly attractive to the worldly! Hence we have often sent men home well satisfied with themselves, convinced that they were religious because they were affected by our eloquence, touched by our appeals, or persuaded by our arguments. In this way, we have made the cross of Christ of none effect and sent souls to hell with a lie in their right hand. Thus, by avoiding the offense of the cross and the foolishness of preaching, we have had to labour in vain, and mourn over an unfruitful ministry.

10) We have not fully preached a free gospel.

We have been afraid of making the gospel 'too free'; scared that people might be led into licentiousness It is not possible to preach too free a gospel, nor can its freeness lead men into sin. It is *only* the free gospel that brings peace, it is only the free gospel which makes men holy. Luther's preaching was summed up in these two points: "that we are justified by faith alone, and that we must be assured that we are justified." He urged others to preach the same. For, it was by such free, full, bold preaching of the glorious gospel, unmixed with our works, merits, terms, conditions, and unclouded by the fancied humility of doubts, fears, uncertainties, that such blessed success accompanied his labours. Let us go and do likewise. So, we must insist that the sinner turns immediately to God and demand, in our Master's name, the immediate surrender of the same sinner's heart to Christ. It is strange that sudden conversions should be so much disliked by some ministers. They are the most scriptural of all conversions.

11) We have not fully honoured the Word of God.

We have given a greater prominence to man's writings, man's opinions, man's

systems in our studies than to the Word. We have drunk more out of human cisterns than divine. We have held more communion with man than with God. Hence the mould and fashion of our spirits, our lives, our words, have been derived more from man than from God. We must study the Bible more, we must steep our souls in it and not only lay it up within us but transfuse it through the whole texture of the soul.

12) We have not been men of prayer.
The spirit of prayer has slumbered amongst us, we do not often visit nor delight in the prayer closet. We allow business, study, even active labour to interfere with our prayer hours. The feverish atmosphere of the church and society has found its way into our closet, disturbing the sweet calm of its blessed solitude. Sleep, company, idle visiting, foolish talking and joking, idle reading, unprofitable occupations, take up time that ought to have been redeemed for prayer.

Why is there so little anxiety to get time to pray? Why is there so little forethought in the laying out of time and employments so as to secure a large portion of each day for prayer? There so much speaking, yet little prayer. Why is there so much running about and so little prayer? Why so much bustle and business, yet so little prayer? There are endless meetings with our fellow-men, but so few meetings with God. Why do we neglect to be alone and to thirst for the hours of unbroken intimate fellowship with God that we never want it to end? It is the neglect of all these that injures our growth in grace, making us such unprofitable members of the church of Christ and rendering our lives useless.

In order to grow in grace, we must be much alone with the Lord. It is not in society, even Christian society, that the soul grows most rapidly and vigorously: in one single quiet hour of prayer, it will often make more progress than in days of company with others. It is in the desert that the dew falls freshest and the air is purest. So, with the soul. It is when none but God is nigh; when his presence is like the desert air, in which there is mingled no noxious breath of man, that surrounds and pervades our soul, it is then that the eye gets the clearest, simplest view of eternal certainties Then the soul gathers in wondrous refreshment, power, and energy.

It is only by this way that we become truly useful to others. When we come fresh from communion with God, we go out and do his work successfully. It is in the

closet that our vessels overflow with blessing, so that emerging from our prayers we cannot keep it to ourselves but pour it out wherever we go. We cannot say, as did Isaiah: "My Lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime, and I am stationed at my guard post whole nights" (Isaiah 21:8). Our life has not been a lying-in-wait for the voice of God. "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth" (1Samuel 3:9) has not been the attitude of our souls, the guiding principle of our lives. Nearness to God, fellowship with God, waiting upon God, resting in God, have been too little characteristic either of our private or of our ministerial walk. Hence our example has been so powerless, our labours so unsuccessful, our sermons so meagre, our whole ministry so fruitless and feeble.

13) We have not honoured the Spirit of God.

Perhaps, in our words we recognise the Holy Spirit's work, but we have not kept this continually before our eyes and the eyes of the Lord's people. We do not give him the glory that is due to his name. We do not seek his teaching, his anointing which is the "unction from the Holy One" by which we "know all things" (1 John 2:20). Neither in the study of the Word nor in the preaching of it to others have we truly acknowledge his office as the Enlightener of the understanding, the Revealer of the truth, the Testifier and Glorifier of Christ. Thus, we dishonour his person, the third person of the glorious Trinity. We grieve him by trivialising his office as the Teacher, Convincer, Comforter, and Sanctifier. Hence, he has almost departed from us and left us to reap the fruit of our own perversity and unbelief.

Besides all this, we grieve him by our inconsistent walk. Instead of watchfulness we are marked by worldly-mindedness, unholiness, prayerlessness, unfaithfulness and lack of solemnity. We offend him by our life which is so unlike the character of a disciple or the office of ambassador. An old Scottish minister thus writes concerning himself:

> I find a want of the Spirit—of the power and demonstration of the Spirit—in praying, speaking, and exhorting; that whereby men are mainly convinced, and whereby they are a terror and a wonder unto others, so as they stand in awe of them; that glory and majesty whereby respect and reverence are procured; that whereby Christ's sermons were differenced from those of the scribes and Pharisees; which I judge to be the beams of God's majesty and of the Spirit of holiness breaking out and shining through his people. But my foul garments are on! Woe is me! The crown of glory and majesty is fallen

off my head; my words are weak and carnal, not mighty; whereby contempt is bred. No remedy for this but humility, self-loathing, and a striving to maintain fellowship with God."

14) We have had little of the mind of Christ.

We fall far short of the example of the apostles, much more of Christ; we are so far behind the servants and much farther behind the Master. We have little of the grace, compassion, meekness, lowliness, and love of God's eternal Son. His weeping over Jerusalem is a feeling far beyond our heartfelt sympathy. We hardly imitate his "seeking of the lost" and we shrink back from his unwearied "teaching of the multitudes" as too much hard work. His days of fasting, his nights of watchfulness and prayer, are not fully realised as models for us to copy. We hardly remember as our guiding principle how he did not count his own life precious to himself in order to glorify the Father and finish the work he was given to do. Yet surely we must follow his steps: the servant is to walk where his Master has led the way; the under-shepherd is to be what the Chief Shepherd was. We must not seek rest or ease in a world where he whom we love had none.

Chapter 5

Revival in the Ministry

The Difficulty of Revival

It is much easier to speak or write about revival than to pursue it. There is so much rubbish to be swept out, so many self-caused hindrances to be dealt with, so many old habits to be overcome. We have overwhelming laziness and casualness to fight against, there is 'ministerial routine' to be broken through, and we have yet to crucify ourselves and the world. As Christ said of the unclean spirit that the disciples could not cast out, so we may say of these: "This kind

does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21).

This was true of a minister in the seventeenth century who lamented the evils of his life and his ministry and resolved to pursue this renewal:

1) In imitation of Christ and his apostles, and to get good done, I purpose to rise timely every morning.

2) To prepare, as soon as I am up, some work to be done, and how and when to do it; to engage my heart to it; and at even to call myself to account and to mourn over my failings.

3) To spend a sufficient portion of time every day in prayer, reading, meditating, spiritual exercises: morning, midday, evening, and ere I go to bed.

4) Once in the month, either the end or middle of it, I keep a day of humiliation for the public condition, for the Lord's people and their sad condition, for raising up the work and people of God.

5) I spend, besides this, one day for my own private condition, in fighting against spiritual evils and to get my heart more holy, or to get some special exercise accomplished, once in six months.

6) I spend once every week, four hours over and above my daily portion in private, for some special causes relating either to myself or others.

7) To spend some time on Saturday, towards night, for preparation for the Lord's Day.

8) To spend six or seven days together, once a year, when most convenient, wholly and only on spiritual accounts.

Let us heed this example, he set about personal and ministerial revival – so must we.

The Need for Revival Today

If he needed it much, we need it more. The Lord raised up Gildas and Salvian to alarm and arouse a careless church and a formal ministry in the fifth and sixth centuries. A thousand years later this task fell to the Reformers. Baxter, among others in the seventeenth century, was prominent in stimulating the casual piety and dormant energies of his fellow ministers. In the eighteenth, God raised up several remarkable men to awaken the church and lead the way to a higher and bolder career of ministerial duty. So too, the present century is in no less need of awakening. We have experienced many symptoms of life, but most are still not quickened. We need a new Baxter to arouse us by his voice and example. We see the appalling ministerial laziness and inefficiency that spreads over our

land. How long, O Lord, how long!

More special effort and united and fervent prayer must be directed at infusing new life into the ministry. The Lord's people must pray more earnestly for the students, preachers and ministers of the Christian church. Our country needs a living ministry; without it we cannot expect to escape the judgments of God. We need men that will spend and be spent, that will labour and pray, that will watch and weep for souls.

Myconius Learns his Lesson

Melchior Adam wrote a striking account of Luther's friend, Myconius, which was the turning point in his life and led him to devote his energies to the cause of Christ.

> The first night that he entered the monastery, intending to become a monk, he dreamed; and it seemed as if he was wandering alone in a vast wilderness. Suddenly a guide appeared and led him out to a lovely valley, watered by a pleasant stream which he was not allowed to drink, and then to a marble fountain of pure water. He tried to kneel and drink, when, Behold! a crucified Saviour stood before his sight, from whose wounds gushed an abundant stream. At once his guide threw him into the fountain and his mouth encountered the flowing wounds and he drank most sweetly, never to thirst again! No sooner had he refreshed himself than he was led away by his guide to be taught what great things he was yet to do for the crucified One, whose precious wounds had poured the living water into his soul. He came to a broad plain covered with ripe grain and the guide ordered him to reap. He excused himself, saying that he was wholly unskilled in such labour. "What you do not know you shall learn," was the reply. They came nearer, and he saw a solitary reaper toiling at the sickle with such prodigious effort as if he were determined to reap the whole field himself. The guide ordered him to join this labourer, and seizing a sickle, showed him how to proceed.
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> Again, the guide led him to a hill. He surveyed the vast plain beneath him and asked how long it would take to reap such a field with so few labourers. "Before winter the last stalk must be harvested," replied his guide. "Proceed with all your might. The Lord of the harvest will send more reapers soon." Wearied with his labours, Myconius rested for a little. Again, the crucified One was at his side, wasted and marred in form. The guide laid his hand on Myconius, saying: "You must be conformed to him."

With these words the dreamer awoke. But he awoke to a life of zeal and love. He found the Saviour for his own soul, and he went forth to preach him to others. He took his place by the side of that noble reaper, Martin Luther. He was stimulated by his example and toiled with him in the vast field, till labourers arose on every side and the harvest was reaped before the winter came.

The lesson to us is: thrust in your sickles. The fields are white, and they are wide in compass; the labourers are few, but there are some devoted ones toiling there already. In other years we have seen Whitefield and Hill putting forth their enormous efforts, as if they would reap the whole field alone. Let us join ourselves to such men, and the Lord of the harvest will not leave us to toil alone.

Reaping the Great Harvest

"When do you intend to stop?" was the question once put by a friend to Rowland Hill. "Not till we have carried all before us," was the prompt reply. Such is our answer too. The fields are vast, the grain whitens, the harvest waves; and through grace we shall go forth with our sickles. We are not to rest until we lie down where the Lamb himself leads us, by the living fountains of waters, where God shall wipe off the sweat of toil from our weary foreheads and dry up all the tears of earth from our weeping eyes. Some of us are young and fresh: many days may be before us, in the providence of God. These must be days of strenuous, ceaseless, persevering, and, if God blesses us, successful toil. We shall labour until we are worn out and laid to rest.

C. Preaching to Plague Victims

Vincent, the Puritan, in his small volume on the great plague and fire in London (1666), entitled *God's Terrible Voice in the City*, describes how the faithful ministers who remained in the danger discharged their solemn duties to the dying inhabitants, He tells how the terror-stricken crowds hung with breathless eagerness upon their lips, to drink in salvation before the dreaded pestilence had swept them away to their graves. Churches were flung open, but the pulpits were silent, for there was none to occupy them; the hirelings had fled (John 10:12-13). Just then, God's faithful band of persecuted ministers came out of hiding to fill the abandoned pulpits. They stood up in the midst of the dying and the dead, to proclaim eternal life to people who were expecting to die before the morrow. They preached in season and out of season. Weekday or Sunday was the same

to them. It did not matter whether or not it was an official time for a Church meeting. Instead of worrying about trifles, they lifted up their voices like trumpets and spared no-one. Every sermon might be their last. Graves were lying open around them and life seemed not merely a handbreadth but a hairbreadth. Death was nearer than ever, eternity stood out in all its vast reality and souls were seen as precious. Opportunities were not to be wasted. The world was just a vanishing shadow; a man's days on earth had been reduced from seventy or eighty years into the twinkling of an eye!

Oh, how they preached! There was no fancy grammar, nor exalted arguments, and no boring passages to chill their appeals or make the sermons unintelligible. No fear of man, no love of popular applause, no over-scrupulous avoidance of strong expressions, and no fear of excitement or enthusiasm prevented them from pouring out the whole fervour of their hearts, which yearned with tenderness unutterable over dying souls.

> "Old Time," says Vincent, "seemed to stand at the head of the pulpit with his great scythe, saying with a hoarse voice, 'Work while it is called today: at night I will mow you down.' Grim Death seemed to stand beside the pulpit, with its sharp arrow, saying, 'If you shoot God's arrows, I will shoot mine.' The grave seemed to lie open at the foot of the pulpit, with dust in her bosom, saying:
>
> *'Make loud your cry, to God, to men, and so fulfil your trust;*
> *Here you will lie, mouth still, breath gone, and silent in the dust.'*
>
> Ministers now had awakening calls to seriousness and fervour in their ministerial work, to preach on the side and brink of the pit into which thousands were tumbling. There was such a vast concourse of people in the churches where these ministers were to be found that they could not many times come near the pulpit doors for the press, but were forced to climb over the pews to them; and such a face was seen in the assemblies as seldom was seen before in London; such eager looks, such open ears, such greedy attention, as if every word that dropped from the mouths of the ministers would be eaten."

That is how they preached, and people heard in those days of terror and death. Men serious in speaking and in hearing. There was no coldness, no laziness, no studied oratory. Truly they preached as dying men to dying men.

But the question is: Should it ever be otherwise? Should there ever be less

fervour in preaching or less eagerness in hearing than there was then? True, life was a little shorter then, but that was all. Death and its issues are still the same. Eternity is still the same. The soul is still the same. Only one small element was thrown in then which does not always exist to such an extent; namely, the increased shortness of life. But that was all the difference.

D. Unbelief Weakens Our Testimony

Why then should our preaching be less fervent, our appeals less affectionate, our demands less bold? Time may be a little stronger than it was then, yet only a very little. Its everlasting issues are still as momentous, as unchangeable. Surely it is our unbelief that makes the difference! It is unbelief that makes ministers so cold in their preaching, so slothful in visiting, and so remiss in all their sacred duties. It is unbelief that chills the life and straitens the heart. It is unbelief that makes ministers handle eternal realities with such irreverence. It is unbelief that makes them ascend with so light a step "that awful place the pulpit," to deal with immortal beings about heaven and hell.

Hear one of Richard Baxter's appeals:

> I have been ready to wonder, when I have heard such weighty things delivered, how people can forbear crying out in the congregation; much more how they can rest till they have gone to their ministers and learned what they should do. Oh, that heaven and hell should work no more upon men! Oh, that everlastingness should work no more! Oh, how can you forbear when you are alone to think what it is to be everlastingly in joy or in torment! I wonder that such thoughts do not break your sleep; and that they come not in your mind when you are about your labour! I wonder how you can almost do anything else; how you can have any quietness in your minds; how you can eat or drink or rest till you have got some ground of everlasting consolations!
>
> Is that a man or a corpse that is not affected with matters of this importance? that can be readier to sleep than to tremble when he heareth how he must stand at the bar of God? Is that a man or a clod of clay that can rise or lie down without being deeply affected with his everlasting estate? that can follow his worldly business but make nothing of the great business of salvation or damnation; and that, when they know it is hard at hand? Truly, Sirs, when I think of the weight of the matter, I wonder at the very best of God's saints upon earth that they are no better and do no more in so weighty a case. I wonder at those whom the world accounts more holy than necessary, and

> scorns for making too much ado, that they can put off Christ and their souls with so little; that they pour not out their souls in every supplication; that they are not more taken up with God; that their thoughts are not more serious in preparation of their accounts. I wonder that they be not a hundred times more strict in their lives, and more laborious and unwearied in striving for the crown than they are.
>
> And for myself, as I am ashamed of my dull and careless heart, and of my slow and unprofitable course of life; so, the Lord knows, I am ashamed of every sermon I preach; when I think what I have been speaking of, and who sent me, and that men's salvation or damnation is so much concerned in it, I am ready to tremble lest God should judge me as a slighter of his truths and the souls of men, and lest in the best sermon I should be guilty of their blood. Methinks we should not speak a word to men in matters of such consequence without tears, or the greatest earnestness that possibly we can; were not we too much guilty of the sin that we reprove, it would be so.

We are not really serious either in preaching or in hearing. If we were, could we be so cold, so prayerless, so inconsistent, so slothful, so worldly, so unlike men whose business is all about eternity?

We must be more in earnest if we would win souls. We must be more in earnest if we would walk in the footsteps of our beloved Lord, or if we would fulfil the vows that are upon us. We must be more in earnest if we would be less than hypocrites. We must be more in earnest if we would finish our course with joy, and obtain the crown at the Master's coming. We must work while it is day; the night comes when no man can work.

Appendix: Bonar's selections from *A Humble Acknowledgment of the Sins of the Ministry of Scotland*, by the Church of Scotland, 1651

1) Entrance into the Ministry

Before entrance on the ministry: "Lightness and profanity in conversation, unsuitable to that holy calling which they did intend, not thoroughly repented of. Not studying to be in Christ before they be in the ministry; nor to have the practical knowledge and experience of the mystery of the gospel in themselves before they preach it to others. Neglecting to fit themselves for the work of the ministry, in not improving prayer and fellowship with God, opportunities of a lively ministry, and other means, and not mourning for these neglects. Not studying self-denial, nor resolving to take up the cross of Christ. Negligence to entertain a sight and sense of sin and misery; not wrestling against corruption, nor studying mortification and subdued-ness of spirit."

Upon entrance on the ministry: "Entering to the ministry without respect to a commission from Jesus Christ, by which it hath come to pass that many have run unsent. Entering to the ministry not from the love of Christ, nor from a desire to honour God in gaining of souls, but for a name and for a livelihood in the world notwithstanding a solemn declaration to the contrary at admission."

After entrance on the ministry: "Ignorance of God, want of nearness with him, and taking up little of God in reading, meditating, and speaking of him. Exceeding great selfishness in all that we do; acting from ourselves, for ourselves, and to ourselves. Not caring how unfaithful and negligent others were, so being it might contribute a testimony to our faithfulness and diligence, but being rather content, if not rejoicing, at their faults. Least delight in those things wherein lieth our nearest communion with God; great inconstancy in our walk with God, and neglect of acknowledging him in all our ways. In going about duties, least careful of those things that are most remote from the eyes of men. Seldom in secret prayer with God, except to fit for public performance; and even that much neglected or gone about very superficially.

2) Glad to Find Excuses

"Glad to find excuses for the neglect of duties. Neglecting the reading of Scriptures in secret, for edifying ourselves as Christians; only reading them in so far as may fit us for our duty as ministers, and oftentimes neglecting that. Not given to reflect upon our own ways, nor allowing conviction to have a thorough work upon us; deceiving ourselves by resting upon absence from and abhorrence of evils from the light of a natural conscience, and looking upon the same as an evidence of a real change of state and nature. Evil guarding of and watching over the heart, and carelessness in

self-searching, which makes much unacquaintedness with ourselves and estrangedness from God. Not guarding nor wrestling against seen and known evils, especially our predominants. A facility to be drawn away with the temptations of the time, and other particular temptations, according to our inclinations and fellowship.

"Instability and wavering in the ways of God, through the fears of persecutions, hazard, or loss of esteem; and declining duties because of the fear of jealousies and reproaches. Not esteeming the cross of Christ and sufferings for his name, honourable, but rather shifting sufferings from self-love. Deadness of spirit, after all the sore strokes of God upon the land. Little conscience made of secret humiliation and fasting, by ourselves apart and in our families, that we might mourn for our own and the land's guiltiness and great backslidings; and little applying of public humiliation to our own hearts. Finding of our own pleasure, when the Lord calls for our humiliation.

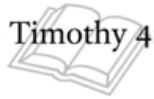
"Not laying to heart the sad and heavy sufferings of the people of God abroad, and the not-thriving of the kingdom of Jesus Christ and the power of godliness among them. Refined hypocrisy; desiring to appear what, indeed, we are not. Studying more to learn the language of God's people than their exercise. Artificial confessing of sin, without repentance; professing to declare iniquity, and not resolving to be sorry for sin. Confession in secret much slighted, even of those things whereof we are convicted. No reformation, after solemn acknowledgments and private vows; thinking ourselves

This book, originally published in 1877, is reprinted for the benefit of the Lord's people. May the Lord grant us an insight into Bonar's bold and urgent appeals to all to the ministry of the Word. May our Master work in us all, so that we look to him *alone* for true blessing, and the provision of under-shepherds after his heart to gather and feed his sheep.

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(Editing has been quite extensive. Vocabulary and syntax have been simplified, Scripture references provided and in places repetition or redundancy omitted. A large section quoting the document *A Humble Acknowledgment of the Sins of the Ministry of Scotland* was made an appendix.)

John Wycliffe



2 Timothy 4:2

Theological College