

The Minister's True Life and Walk

By Horatius Bonar

Saved and Sanctified

THE TRUE MINISTER must be a true Christian. He must be called by God before he can call others to God. The Apostle Paul thus states the matter: "God... hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). They were first reconciled, and then they had given to them the ministry of reconciliation. Are we ministers reconciled? It is but reasonable that a man who is to act as 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"; but is it not true also that the melancholy obstruction is not composed of members of churches only? Let us take heed unto ourselves!

As the minister's life is in more than one respect the life of a ministry, let us speak a few words on ministerial holy living.

Let us seek the Lord early. "If my heart be early seasoned with his presence, it will savor of him all day after," Let us see God before man every day. "I ought to pray before seeing any one. 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 day, 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." (McCheyne)

Hear this true servant of Christ exhorting a beloved brother: "Take heed to thyself 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 labor 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." Would that it were so with 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 luster, you need only translate it into action." Walking with God is a very commonplace truth. Translate this truth into action—how lustrous it becomes! The phrase, how hackneyed!—the thing, 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 translation!

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 ere long, as of him, "He was in the first year visited by about a thousand persons under serious impressions."

Study the Speakers, Not the Sermons

To the men even more than to their doctrine we would point the eye of the inquirer who asks, Whence came their success? Why, may not the same success be ours? We may take the sermons of Whitefield or Berridge or Edwards for our study or pattern, but it is the individuals themselves that we must mainly set before us; it is with the spirit of the men, more than of their works, that we are to be imbued, if we are imulous of a ministry as powerful, as victorious as theirs. They were spiritual men, and walked with God. It is living fellowship with a living Savior which, transforming us into His image, fits us for being able and successful ministers of the gospel.

Without this nothing else will avail. Neither orthodoxy, nor learning, nor eloquence, nor power of argument, nor zeal, nor fervor, will accomplish naught without this. 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 stouthearted rebel. From them that walk with Him in holy, happy intercourse, a virtue seems to go forth, a blessed fragrance seems to compass them whithersoever they go. Nearness to Him, intimacy with Him, assimilation to His character—these are the elements of a ministry of power.

When we can tell our people, "We beheld His glory, and therefore we speak of it; it is not from report we speak, but we have seen the King in His beauty"—how lofty the position we occupy! Our power in drawing men to Christ springs chiefly from the fullness of our personal joy in Him, and the nearness of

our personal communion with Him. The countenance that reflects most of Christ, and shines most with His love and grace, is most fitted 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 must be the fruit of a holy, peaceful, loving intimacy with the Lord.

Faithfulness Essential to Success

“The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity” (Malachi 2:6). Let us observe the connection here declared to subsist between faithfulness and success in the work of the ministry; between a godly life and the “turning away many from iniquity.” The end for which we first took office, as we declared at ordination, was the saving of souls; the end for which we still live and labor is the same; the means to this end are a holy life and a faithful fulfillment of our ministry.

The connection between these two things is close and sure. We are entitled to calculate upon it. We are called upon to pray and labor 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 want of faith, love, prayer, zeal and warmth, spirituality and holiness of life-, for it is by these that the Holy Spirit is grieved away. Success is attainable; success is desirable; success is promised by God; and nothing on earth can be more bitter to the soul of a faithful minister than the want 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 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!

Of all men, a minister of Christ is especially called to walk with God. Everything depends on this; his own peace and joy, his own future reward at the coming of the Lord. But especially does God point 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 benighted world-, and the closer he walks, the more of this light does he reflect. One who walks with God carries in his very air and countenance a sweet serenity and holy joy that diffuses tranquility around. One who walks with God receives and imparts life whithersoever he goes; as it is written, 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 waste to blossom as the rose. He waters the world's wilderness as he moves along his peaceful course. His life is blessed; his example is blessed; his intercourse is blessed; his words are blessed; his ministry is blessed! Souls are saved, sinners are converted, and many are turned from their iniquity.

—Horatius Bonar