

A GOOD MINISTER OF CHRIST

Malachi 2:6
I Timothy 4:11-16
II Timothy 4:1-8

Preaching the gospel of Christ is the greatest task that has ever engaged the mind and energies of man. This task is great because of Him Who calls, commissions, and sustains us. It is great because it deals with that which man cannot give, nor money purchase. This glorious task challenges the very best that noble lives possess.

Concerning a good minister of Christ, I should like to mention six things:

I. His Prerequisites.

1. An ability to preach--physical, mental and spiritual.
2. An experience of grace.
He has no business in ministry without it.
3. An assurance of salvation.
4. A good reputation--never live down a bad one.
5. A good character--what God knows you are.
6. A call from God.

It is a tragedy for a man to presume to be a minister without having a personal and definite call from God. Some enter the ministry from wrong motives, such as, thinking the ministry is an easy way to earn a living, having been advised to do so by others, a desire for the prestige which goes with religious leadership, or believing that the work of the ministry is easier than what they have been doing. Slow mules and a hot sun have "called" some men "to preach."

7. A heart of compassion.
Usefulness in the ministry will depend to a great extent upon a man's love for people and his capacity for sympathy.
8. An eagerness to learn.
Without this one is a hopeless prospect so far as a successful ministry is concerned. Be willing to learn the truth from any source.
9. An unquestioned sincerity.
10. An optimistic spirit.
11. A dedicated life.
God does not demand a beautiful vessel, but He does demand a clean one.
12. A willingness to sacrifice.
If a minister is willing to sacrifice, he will not have to talk about his sacrifice; if he makes sacrifices, people will know it.

II. His Preparation.

A call to preach includes a call to prepare. Preparation largely determines the degree of a minister's success and usefulness.

1. The Word commands us to prepare.
"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." I Timothy 4:13.

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever." II Peter 3:18.

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." II Timothy 2:15.

2. The work challenges us to prepare.

Two phases of preparation:

1. Preparation of the man.

(1) Physical--proper care of the body.

A sound body is to a preacher what a good foundation is to a house.

(2) Intellectual.

A minister needs an education. The New Testament standard is that of a trained ministry. The Bible does not put a premium on ignorance. It is not a sin for a minister to learn and to know something. Our age is calling for a trained ministry. Cannot preach to our age from behind. Any minister who fails to prepare for his work limits his usefulness and stands in the light of those to whom he ministers. Books--Dr. Scroggie's impression of American ministry. Zondewan.

(3) Spiritual.

A faithful cultivation of the soul requires prayer, Bible study and a yielding to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. William Evans illustration--"no prayer, no power." Neglect of Word is appalling.

2. Preparation of the message.

If a minister fails to study, he closes the door to personal efficiency and to effective service. Many ministers are unsuccessful because they have taken the advice of Rosseau about the writing of love letters and applied it to the preaching of sermons. His instructions were: "You should begin without knowing what you are going to say, and end without knowing what you have said." A preacher cannot conceal the lack of preparation, no matter how hard he may try. Two boys sat in the balcony of a church and listened to an unprepared preacher, as he wept his way through. One said, "Jack, what is that old codger crying about?" Jack replied, "Well, Buddy, I guess if you had to stand up there and preach for an hour and a half, and didn't have any more to say than he has, you'd cry too."

A small boy said, "Mother, can I be a preacher when I get to be a man?" The fond mother replied, "Of course you may, if you want to." "Well, I want to," said the lad, "for I guess I'll have to go to church all of my life anyway, and it is a lot harder to sit still than it is to stand up and holler." A preacher must do more than "stand up and holler." An unprepared minister attempted to preach to an audience in which there were numerous preachers. Uncomplimentary remarks followed. One generous brother remarked that he thought the sermon was inspired. When asked why he thought so, he replied, "Well, no man could have preached such a poor sermon without divine aid."

Any preacher who enters the pulpit without a prepared message thereby disappoints his hearers, defeats the purpose of the hour, disparages his ministry, and dishonors his Lord.

III. His Problems.

Even though many think that all a minister has to do is to be able to draw his breath, an inference, a crowd, and a salary, there are actually some problems in the life and work of a minister.

1. Physical--guard your health with utmost care.
2. Spiritual--so busy answering calls that neglect own spiritual life.
3. Intellectual--must study.
4. Moral--guard personal honor with vigilance.
5. Social--don't cultivate too many intimate friendships.
6. Financial--some expect you to live here and board in heaven. Others think humility and poverty are qualifications for ministry. Be careful about money matters. Preaching will never atone for unpaid bills.

IV. His Pitfalls.

1. An unbalanced life--easy to be over-concerned about one thing. Think world can't wait. Do more with sharp axe than a dull one.
2. A short cut.
3. Prayerlessness.
4. Studylessness.
5. Laziness--it is seen during week, and both seen and felt on Sunday.
6. Tactlessness.
7. Selfishness.
8. Self-pity.
9. Social impropriety.
10. Laxness in business matters.
11. Egotism.
12. Jealousy--it is ruinous. Its handmaids are criticism and gossip.
13. Restlessness. A Negro said, "A preacher is that kind of a man what all time want to be whar he ain't."

V. His Preaching.

1. It should be scriptural.
2. It should be simple.
3. It should be sincere.
4. It should be sympathetic.
5. It should be strengthening.
6. It should be short.

To know when to stop preaching is a great achievement. It has been said that "An optimist is a man who reaches for his hat when the preacher says, 'Finally.'". Ideas should have something to do with determining the length of a sermon. It is a good plan to stop preaching when the ideas are exhausted.

VI. His Privileges.

1. Being a real Christian gentleman.
2. Being a good example.
3. Gaining the confidence and love of others.
4. Acquiring a large number of friends.
5. Being Christ's representative in the world.
6. Helping people to get right with God.
7. Helping Christians to live victoriously.
8. Being useful.
9. Being happy in His work.
10. Holding forth the Word of Life.

Preaching the gospel of Christ is the preeminent privilege of the minister; his pulpit is his throne from which he is to wield the scepter of spiritual power. Do not abdicate that throne for anything else. The only person who will minimize great preaching is somebody who cannot preach. But, unless we fasten ourselves to our sermon preparation and pulpit work, we will discover at the end of the way that we have spent our lives on things of secondary importance. Say what you please about a great pulpit ministry, it is the best service to which any man can give his hands, his head, and his heart.

If we will only listen attentively, I believe we shall hear our Lord and many of our people saying, Preacher:

1. Preach the Gospel of Christ.

That is the message which has been given to us; it is the message that people need, and it is the only message that will produce the desired results.

2. Exalt the Lord Jesus Christ.
Send your people away saying, "What a wonderful Saviour!" We cannot exalt Christ enough.
3. Comfort the broken-hearted.
There are broken hearts in every audience, so preach to them.
4. Encourage the people.
They have enough troubles and discouragements without your adding to them.
5. Expound the Word of God.
"Preach the Word." God will use and bless His Word. Preach God's Word and stand by it, and you will find that the God of the Book will stand by you. When God guides, He provides. May God help each of you to be a good and faithful minister of Jesus Christ!