

RECOGNIZING GOD'S CALL TO PREACH

IMPROPER MOTIVATIONS

God alone knows how deep a concern entering the ministry and preaching was to me. I have prayed a thousand times, till the sweat has dropped from my face like rain, that God . . . would not let me enter the Church before he called me and thrust me into his work.

I remember once in Gloucester, I know the room, I look up at the window when I am there; I know the window, the bedside, and the floor upon which I have lain prostrate. I said, 'Lord, I cannot go; I shall be puffed up with pride and fall into the snare of the devil.'

--George Whitefield¹

Introduction:

- A. Sad Sights:
- B. What Is It That Motivates Ungifted Or Uncalled Men To Enter The Ministry?

I. A Vainglorious Lust for People's _____.

- A. There Are Two Notorious Examples In The NT.

- 1. The Pharisees

Matthew 23:5-7 *But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men.*

- 2. Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:18-20).

- B. But This Office Requires That A Man Decisively Deny Himself This Esteem.

Galatians 1:10 *If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.*

I Thess. 2:4 *We speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts.*

I Cor. 1:23 *We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumblingblock and to Gentiles foolishness.*

¹ From his sermon, "The Good Shepherd," as quoted by Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 87

II Cor. 4:9, 10, 13 *We are fools for Christ's sake . . . we are without honor . . . we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things even until now.*
 I Thess. 2:6 . . . *nor did we seek glory from men, either from you, or from others.*

II. A Covetous Spirit for Easy Money or a Secure Livelihood.²

- A. The Notorious Example Here Is _____ (II Peter 2:15).
 B. Our Lord Warned Of Wanna-Be-Shepherds Who Were Thieves And Robbers (John 10:8).

I Samuel 2:36 *Please assign me to one of the priest's offices so that I may eat a piece of bread.*

C. An Authentic Minister . . .

1. Is solemnly charged to be free from loving money.

I Timothy 3:2, 3 *An overseer, then, must be . . . free from the love of money.*

Titus 1:7 *The overseer must be . . . not fond of sordid gain.*

I Peter 5:2 *Shepherd the flock of God . . . not for sordid gain.*

I Timothy 6:10, 11 *The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God.*

2. Can call God to be his witness that he has no hidden, greedy motivation.

I Thessalonians 2:5 *We never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. . . .*

3. Is prepared to forego even his _____ to financial compensation.

I Corinthians 9:14-15 *The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. But I have used none of these things. . . What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*

² See Charles Bridges, "The Spirit of Covetousness," in *The Christian Ministry* (138-144). *Covetousness in ministers*, he laments, *has almost grown to a proverb*. I also cannot recommend too highly an earnest, prayerful meditation on his chapter, "The Want of Self-Denial" (127-138).

III. A Disinclination to Labor and Employment.

A. Due To Unscriptural Minimizing Of The Sacred Significance Of “Secular” Vocations.

B. Due To Carnal Sloth.

(Exp: Actually, following in Paul’s footsteps means that one is prepared to work with one’s hands, not only to supply his own needs, but even those of others!)

Acts 20:33-35 I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were working with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Illustration: The work habits of Dr. Alexander Whyte, the venerable Scottish pastor of Free St. George’s in Edinburgh (1873-1916), were a constant inspiration (or convicting rebuke!) to his fellow ministers and the students preparing for the ministry in the college where he taught part time. His biographer, G. F. Barbour, writes, *Tolerant and forbearing as Dr. Whyte was—ever willing to believe the best of every man provided only he found evidences of real endeavour, however imperfect the result—yet there was one failure for which even his charity found no excuse, since he regarded it as a betrayal of the infinitely sacred trust. ‘I would have laziness held to be the one unpardonable sin in all our students and in all our ministers.’*³

Illustration: John Henry Jowett warned, *Preaching that costs nothing accomplishes nothing. If the study is a lounge, the pulpit will be an impertinence. It is, therefore, imperative that the preacher go into his study to do hard work. We must make the business-man in our congregation feel that we are his peer in labour. There is no man so speedily discovered as an idle minister, and there is no man who is visited with swifter contempt. . . . Let the minister, I say, be as business-like as the business-man. Let him employ system and method, and let him be as scrupulously punctual in his private habits in the service of his Lord, as he would have to be in a government-office in the service of his country.*⁴

Illustration: Alexander Maclaren called every Sunday *two more woes*. He confessed that he could never study in his house slippers but felt compelled to prepare his sermons in his outdoor work boots!

I Timothy 3:1 *If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine _____ he desires to do.*

The man who finds the ministry an easy life will also find that it will bring a hard death.⁵ –C. H. Spurgeon

³ *The Life of Alexander Whyte*, 282.

⁴ *The Preacher: His Life and Work* (114, 116-117).

⁵ *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography*, II, 308. Read his wife’s account of “A Typical Week’s Work” (309-330) in her husband’s ministry at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. She testified, *Surely, there never was a busier life than his; not an atom more of sacred service could have been crowded into it* (329).

IV. Unhealthy Psychological Needs or Unresolved Personal Issues.

A. For _____.

B. For A Fleshly Sense of Spiritual _____.

Ecclesiastes 4:4 *I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind.*

B. For _____.

D. To Mask _____.

V. The Hasty, Unwise Urging of Well-Meaning People.

(Exp: Family members, friends, pastors, evangelists. At the same time, some of these are the people who know you best and are in the best position to help you know. Must be very careful to differentiate between spiritually objective people and emotionally subjective people. Many a man has entered the ministry under the subtle power of a desire to have the approval of the latter.)

Happy that person, who can say with the Apostle, that it is “through the will of God,” and not through his own, or that of his parents, that he is in the sacred Ministry.⁶

VI. A Misunderstanding of Entire, Final Spiritual _____.

Romans 12:1-2

VII. An Inaccurate Assessment of One’s Spiritual _____.

Romans 12:3-8 *For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation. . . .*

Illustration: David Martyn Lloyd-Jones told of the case of a young man who was a very good scientist and who had done well, and was doing well, in his own line. He came to me saying

⁶ Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 93.

that he was sure that he was called to be a preacher. But immediately I knew that he was wrong. Why? Not because of any special insight on my part, but simply because he obviously could scarcely express himself even in private conversation leave alone in public. He was a very able man, but he obviously had not got the gift of communicating. He could not speak freely; he was hesitant and halting and doubtful, and diffident in his whole manner of speech. I did my utmost to prevent his going forward for training. However he would not listen to me because he was so certain of his call. He became a theological student, did very well at Oxford, and eventually was ordained. I think I am right in saying that altogether he had three different churches in about seven years. Then, and as the result of that experience, he came to see quite clearly that he had never been called to preach. He returned to scientific work and is doing well there. That is where he always should have been, because he lacked this essential particular gift of speech.⁷

VIII. A Misapprehension of the Range of Necessary in Ministry.

(Exp: A man may have a natural ability to talk—a gift for gab. He may be able to think quickly on his feet. He may be a “people person,” never meeting a stranger, completely at home with anyone in any circumstance. He may have a great deal of personal assurance and healthy self-confidence. Such a man may mislead himself and others as a kind of “one-sermon-wonder” if he’s given an opportunity from time to time. But being Divinely equipped to teach and preach the entire counsel of God with spiritual unction is beyond this. And even beyond that, the vocational ministry requires much more than speaking ability.)

Charles Jefferson observed, *Many a man in the ministry fails, not because he is bad, but because he has a genius for blundering.*⁸

Charles Jefferson also warned of a tendency to glorify preaching while at the same time despising pastoring. It is visible, he says, *in the sentiments entertained by many young men entering the ministry. They say quite openly that they despise pastoral work. Study they enjoy, books they love, preaching they revel in. But as for shepherding the sheep, their soul hates it. They like to feel that they have special gifts for the pulpit. When their friends prophesy for them a glorious pulpit career, their heart sings. The work of the shepherd was an abomination, we are told, to the ancient Egyptians, and so it is to all pulpit Pharaohs who are interested in building pyramids out of eloquent words.*⁹

IX. An Intense Interest in Studying and Knowing the Scriptures.

(Exp: I don’t believe that any man is called who does not possess this. But its possession is not to be mistaken as the sure mark of a call. In fact, every believer is directed to delight in and meditate unceasingly on the Word of God (Psalm 1:2). Some of the most earnest students of Scripture I’ve ever known have been women!¹⁰)

⁷ *Preaching and Preachers*, 111-112.

⁸ *Quiet Hints for Growing Preachers*, 7.

⁹ *The Minister as Shepherd*, 30-31.

¹⁰ Take a look at W. P. Livingstone’s life of Mary Slessor (*Mary Slessor of Calabar*), with its description of her Bible reading and marking habits. Or for another example of the same, see Mariah Havergal’s

(Exp: Al Martin, in a message entitled, “Six Wrong Reasons for Aspiring to a Teaching Ministry,” cautions (I’m paraphrasing). *At conversion, every new believer experiences love for the brethren, understanding of truth, and love for the truth. These can be mistaken for qualifications for ministry, especially in a day when the level of commitment expected of a new convert is so low. In such a climate, when someone is simply acting like a normal, biblical Christian, it may appear to others that he has an exceptional love and understanding. They will encourage him to seek the ministry, when in fact, he is simply feeling and thinking like normal Christians are supposed to.*)

X. A Sincere Desire to Enjoy Exceptional Intimacy with God.

(Exp: The liberated demoniac implored Jesus that he might accompany Him (Mark 5:18), but the Savior sent him home. David seems to have gazed with longing on the priests and Levites whose calling was the Tabernacle’s sacred precincts with their nearness to the LORD, *How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You to dwell in Your courts* (Psalm 65:4). But his calling was to the palace.)

XI. A Vague Longing for the Spiritual Mystique of Being a Minister.

(Exp: To enter the “inner circle.” To experience the awe, the solemnity, the sacredness, the spiritual weightiness of lonely, secret communication with God. There’s something legitimately attractive about this to a God-called man. On the other hand, it’s also the very thing that ought to caution any man considering this calling. Historically, it’s been the very thing from which many men wisely have stepped back. Moses’ Mt. Sinai, Elijah’s brook, the Baptist’s Judean wilderness, our Savior’s forty days in the desert and early mornings on the Galilean hills, Paul’s years in Arabia and dungeons of prisons, were all very lonely places.)

Conclusion:

Detecting and eliminating wrong motivations is as necessary to knowing with certainty that one is called to preach, as are discovering and nourishing right evidences.

biography of her sister, Frances Ridley, (*Memorials of Frances Ridley Havergal*), especially pages 276-279. Maria writes, *It was at her study table that she read her Bible by seven o’clock in the summer and eight o’clock in winter; her Hebrew Bible, Greek Testament, and lexicons being at hand. Sometimes on bitterly cold mornings, I begged that she would read with her feet comfortably to the fire, and received the reply: ‘But then, Marie, I can’t rule my lines neatly; just see what a find I’ve got! If only one searches, there are such extraordinary things in the Bible!’*