

## The Ideal Minister

*A public address given by the Rev. William Macleod at the commencement of the new academic year in September 2005.*

What should Christians look for when they call a man to be their minister? What should they pray for God to do in their own minister? What should ministers and divinity students strive to be?

### **A Holy Man**

The first essential is of course that a minister be born again. Not all ministers are. Some such as Alexander Henderson and Thomas Chalmers began their ministries unconverted and at a later date were saved and their ministries were transformed. Many today by their failure to preach the Gospel demonstrate that it has never touched their own hearts. Regeneration is the first step to holiness. The Spirit enters the individual's life working faith and repentance and beginning the process of sanctification. What is holiness? In simplest terms it is obedience to God's revealed will in its totality. This means loving God with all your heart and putting Him first in your life, denying yourself and setting your affections on things above. It involves the fear of God, getting to know God more and more, walking with God and delighting in God above all else. The holy minister strives after purity, honesty, contentment with his lot and moderation in all things. McCheyne is reputed to have said that a holy minister is an awful weapon in the hands of God.

### **A Humble Man**

God is a jealous God. Salvation is His work. Without Him we can do nothing. He is grieved and angered by ministers who try to siphon off some glory to themselves for the success of their ministries. We like to talk of what is happening in our church, what we have achieved – the growth, the conversions. We talk as if this were at least partly due to us – our hard work, our great preaching, our communication skills, our pastoring ability, our evangelism or even our holiness and prayers. This is, I believe, the main reason why we are seeing so little fruit in our churches today.

### **A Faithful Man**

Thinking of the difficulties of the ministry, Paul once asked, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' (2Cor.2:16). On every side we meet with hostility or what in some ways is worse, apathy. People are just not interested in our message. They feel no need for Christ. They are content with their possessions and pleasures and they have no fear of God. We preach to dead bones. We have no power ourselves to raise the dead. We are opposed by a powerful enemy, Satan who at times is like a fearful dragon or roaring lion and at other times appears as an angel of light. The ideal minister must look up, see the throne and put his faith in the One who said, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth' (Mt.28:18). He must believe that God is able and willing.

### **A Loving Man**

The ideal minister needs a big heart. He must love his congregation, the flock of God committed to his care, but also the poor sinners all around who are lost. Jesus wept over Jerusalem when He thought of their privileges and the judgment which was about to descend upon them. Paul said, 'I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh' (Rom.9:3). Beware of professionalism. Become emotionally involved with your people, weeping with them as they weep and rejoicing with them as they rejoice. Offend them if necessary, but with tears. Further, our hearts should break as we see our neighbours and fellow-countrymen running madly down the road to hell.

### **A Praying Man**

Jeremiah, an Old Testament minister, is a great man of prayer, constantly talking to God, telling Him of his sorrows, his griefs, his burdens and his joys. Paul assures the various churches that he is praying for them without ceasing. Christ encourages us, 'Ask, and it shall be given you' (Mt7:7). You give good gifts to your children; how much more will God give the Holy Spirit to them who ask (Lk.11:13). The presence of the Spirit makes us powerful and effective but His absence leaves us weak. There are many details for which it is right to pray, but we must especially wrestle for revival. Remember John Welsh of Ayr who could spend eight hours a day praying, 'God give me Scotland'. The ideal minister is a man of prayer.

### **A Studious Man**

Paul said to Timothy, 'Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth' (2Tim.2:15). Earlier he had said, 'Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine' (1Tim.4:13). Feed your own soul and then you will be in a position to feed others. Be much in the best books. There is a great deal of chaff around today. Study the classics – Calvin, the Puritans, Edwards, Spurgeon, the Princeton men, the old Free Church men and others like them. Be constantly reading and meditating on the Scriptures. The minister who neglects study will not keep fresh in his preaching.

### **A Zealous Man**

The ideal minister is passionate and hot blooded. Because he loves the truth he will fight earnestly for it. He must distinguish between primary and secondary truths, but he will die for the fundamentals of the faith. Having carefully prepared his sermons he will make sure that they are packed with important points. If the sermon is worth preaching it is worth preaching with all your heart. You mean it. You overcome your natural shyness and look the congregation in the eye and plead with them to respond. Of Christ it was said, 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up' (Jn.2:17). The ideal minister preaches his heart out. Similarly in pastoral work there is no trifling.

### **An Evangelistic Man**

Faith cometh by hearing, but 'How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!' (Rom.10:14-15). A large part of a minister's work is bringing glad tidings of good things. People will not be converted unless they hear the Gospel. That places an awesome responsibility upon the minister. There may be few unconverted people in our churches yet we must preach evangelistically. But we must not confine our evangelism to the church building. 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature' (Mk.16:15). The ideal minister goes out to all mankind in God's name as God's ambassador, calling for repentance and freely offering Christ to sinners.

### **A Persistent Man**

The work of the ministry is hard. No work is more demanding. It is a life – twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and fifty-two weeks a year. In a sense there are no holidays and there is no retirement. People will break your heart but you must not give up. The world says resign, the devil says resign and the flesh says resign but the minister dare not. Others may resign and walk away but not him. God has called and appointed him. He must stand in his post till God tells him to move on. It is a great work. No work on earth is of more significance. Something is being built which will last

forever. Though at times weeping and heart-broken the ideal minister rises from his knees, bandages his wounds, wipes his tears, encourages himself in the Lord and keeps on going.

### **An Anointed Man**

Above all the ideal minister is an anointed man. Without the Spirit all is in vain. The ideal minister must walk in the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, pastor, evangelise and preach in the Spirit. He must be optimistic looking for the Spirit to do what he cannot do. He must yearn for revival when a nation is born in a day. The darkest situation can be transformed – indeed it is often darkest before the dawn. We live in a day of great spiritual need. Christians are worldly and sinners are hardened. But the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save. Oh for men anointed with God's Holy Spirit!

**Rev William Macleod (September 2005)**