

# The Call to the Ministry

by

**CHARLES H. SPURGEON**

*“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”*

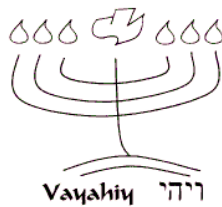
—1 Corinthians 9:16

Introduction & Brief Memoir by  
& Edited in 21<sup>st</sup> Century American Language by  
Jon Cardwell



All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked “KJV” are from the King James Version of the Holy Bible. The King James Version is in the Public Domain.



## INTRODUCTION

“The Call to the Ministry” was taken from the second lecture of Mr. Spurgeon’s *Lectures to My Students*, selections from addresses delivered to the students of The Pastor’s College at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London. Robert Carter & Brothers published the book in New York in 1890.

A cursory inspection of the kind of messages that are coming from modern pulpits seems to suggest that there are many men (and women!) that have answered “the call to ministry” who probably should never have been there in the first place; teaching outright that Scripture is not inerrant, suggesting deficiencies in the nature and character of God, forsaking the infinite glories of God’s eternal work through the Cross of Jesus Christ, and etceteras. The observation of Mr. Spurgeon expressed to his students over a century ago is even more appropriate today: “That hundreds have missed their way, and stumbled against a pulpit is sadly evident from the fruitless ministries and decaying churches that surround us.” The pastoral ministry is a calling that I take quite seriously and view quite solemnly; and I pray that this edition may be used to minister unto future ministers, if the Lord should tarry.

This updated edition in modern American language has been made available from our ministry. I attempted to stay as true to the original text as possible, making changes in grammar and structure so as to make the reading easier for this day and age. I’ve used some footnotes to explain certain illustrations or expressions, yet, only where absolutely necessary.

—J. CARDWELL  
Moreno Valley, California  
September 12, 2008

## A BRIEF MEMOIR OF C. H. SPURGEON

by Jon Cardwell

Because this modern language edition of “The Call to the Ministry” is designed to reach an audience who may have never heard of Charles Spurgeon... or possibly have heard his name, yet did not really know anything about him, this brief memoir will, hopefully, familiarize you just a bit with this 19<sup>th</sup> century minister who is hailed, even today, as “*the Prince of Preachers.*”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was born in Kelvedon, Essex, in England on June 19, 1834 to John and Eliza Spurgeon. His father, John, and his grandfather, James, were both Congregationalist ministers.

Charles Spurgeon fell under conviction and was converted at 15. Walking into a small Primitive Methodist assembly in Colchester on January 6, 1850, young Spurgeon heard the layman at the pulpit read from Isaiah 45:22, “*Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*” The Spirit of the Lord moved upon him and brought him repentance and faith right there. Nearly four months later, he was baptized at the River Lark, in Isleham, on May 3, 1850. His mother, Eliza, said to him, “Ah, Charles! I often prayed the Lord to make you a Christian, but I never asked that you become a Baptist.”

Young Charles responded, “Ah, mother! The Lord has answered your prayer with His usual bounty, and given you exceeding abundantly above what you asked or thought.”

1850 proved to be a monumental year for Charles Spurgeon: saved by grace in January, baptized into fellowship in May, and later preaches his first sermon at a cottage in Teversham. Charles would preach his first sermon at Waterbeach Baptist Chapel on October 12, 1851. Waterbeach would be his first pastorate before he turned 17 years of age.

While at Waterbeach, young Spurgeon was “strongly advised” to apply for admission to the Baptist College in Stepney to more fully prepare for ministry. Arrangements were made for Charles to meet with the college’s tutor, Dr. Angus, in Cambridge at the home of Mr. MacMillan. As Charles arrived at his appointed time, the housemaid showed him to a room where he waited patiently for a

couple of hours. The housemaid told no one of Spurgeon's arrival while Dr. Angus sat in another room until he could wait no longer and finally left for London. The good doctor was gone when young Charles finally inquired after him. After leaving the MacMillan house, he thought of applying for college admission at once and while walking on the little wooden bridge that leads to Chesterton, a portion of Scripture came strongly to him, "*Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not*" (Jeremiah 45:5). He immediately began to rethink his motives and intentions, as well as his passions and priorities. It seemed that God's plans and purposes for him did not include a formal college education.

A deacon of London's New Park Street Chapel was visiting the countryside and heard "The Boy Preacher" expound God's Word at Waterbeach. He invited Charles to preach at this well-known London church, whose pulpit had been filled previously with renowned pastors, Benjamin Keach, John Gill, and John Rippon. Spurgeon preached his first sermon there on December 18, 1853. After preaching there, Charles was offered a 6-month provisional position as interim pastor, but Charles countered with a 3-month probation period instead of 6 months because he was concerned that if the congregation didn't like him, he wouldn't have to impose upon them any longer than necessary. The Lord's providence smiled upon the 232-member congregation because they wouldn't have to wait for 6 months to call Mr. Spurgeon to the pastorate. Charles Spurgeon accepted the Lord's call to the New Park Street pulpit and preached his first sermon as the congregation's settled resident pastor on April 28, 1854. He had not yet reached his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Charles Spurgeon met his bride at the New Park Street Chapel, Miss Susannah Thompson of Falcon Square, London. They were wed on January 8, 1856 and honeymooned in Paris, France for ten days in the Spring of that year. Twins, Thomas and Charles, who were not identical, were born to the couple on September 20, 1856.

Although a formal college education was not what the Lord would have for Charles Spurgeon, he was not uneducated. Spurgeon read as many as six books per week. He read John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* annually and often sat with his wife, Susannah, reading to one another from the works of the Puritan

authors.

By this time, Charles Spurgeon had become the most well known minister in London. Crowds flocked to hear the young minister and many were convicted and converted under the Spirit's anointing through the preaching of Christ and Him crucified. Souls were saved, not by human "decisions" from man's "freewill" prompted by planned or purposed tactics, but instead, by presenting quite clearly and simply the very plain gospel truths of Scripture. Because of the numerous conversions and his popularity as a preacher of God's Word, the New Park Street Chapel had already added several services to Sunday's schedule. Even with the additional services, the congregation had outgrown their facility. In 1856, the Metropolitan Tabernacle Building Committee had already begun meeting for the construction of a larger facility. Meanwhile, the congregation moved to Exeter Hall, and later to Surrey Music Hall. There, Mr. Spurgeon would preach to audiences of more than 10,000 people.

1856 saw also the beginning of what would eventually be called "The Pastor's College." The school started with one student-minister, Mr. T. W. Medhurst, with Mr. George Rogers as the teacher. Eventually, The Pastor's College would grow to over one hundred students per year by the last years of Mr. Spurgeon's ministry. The theological foundation of the Pastor's College was Calvinistic in the tradition of the Reformed faith and Baptist in the tradition of the Puritans. Spurgeon was very careful that both staff and students adhered to those doctrines, stating, "We know nothing of new ologies; we stand by the old ways.... Believing that the Puritanic school embodied more of gospel truth in it than any other since the days of the apostles, we continue in the same line of things; and by God's help, hope to have a share in that revival of Evangelical doctrine which is as sure to come as the Lord Himself." Many of the students not only filled empty pulpits throughout the British Empire, but also filled pulpits among the 80 or more churches planted by Mr. Spurgeon himself.

The Metropolitan Tabernacle was constructed at Elephant and Castle, in Southwark, with seating for 5,500 and standing room for another 500. The Metropolitan Tabernacle opened with a Great Prayer Meeting on March 18, 1861.

The ministry of Charles Spurgeon and the Lord's congregation under his care were involved in a great many ministries locally and abroad. Orphanages

were built and staffed. Mission work was supported to distant lands. Through his friendship and spiritual kinship with James Hudson Taylor, Mr. Spurgeon personally supported the work in China through the China Inland Mission, an interdenominational evangelistic mission founded by Mr. Taylor.

Charles Spurgeon was a man well acquainted with physical suffering, having an opportunity to draw nearer his Lord and trusting in Him alone for solace due to chronic gout, rheumatoid arthritis, and kidney disease (Bright's disease). When once asked to describe the pain he was in when stricken with rheumatism one winter, Mr. Spurgeon replied very candidly, "Imagine placing your foot in a vice and tightening the vice as far as it will go; then tighten it four more turns."

Charles Spurgeon preached his last sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on June 7, 1891. Suffering from very poor health because of the symptoms of his ailments, Mr. Spurgeon traveled to Menton, France, on October 26, 1891. Resting in Menton for three months, Charles Spurgeon retired to his bed on January 20, 1892 and passed into glory on January 31, 1892. His remains were taken back to England and were interred and buried at West Norwood Cemetery in London on February 11, 1892.

For nearly 40 years, beginning with his first sermon at Waterbeach Baptist Chapel in the Fall of 1851 and ending with his last sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in the Summer of 1891, the pastoral ministry of Charles Spurgeon saw the publication of several books, thousands of sermons and articles, the establishment of several missions, mercy ministries, and church plants, and 14,692 souls baptized. It would be very reasonable to say that the ministry and influence of Mr. Charles Haddon Spurgeon has reached far more people all around the world in the past 127 years following his death than all those reached during his lifetime.

*"But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:20-21, KJV).*

## THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY

by CHARLES H. SPURGEON

Any Christian has a right to spread the gospel that has the ability to do so; and more, he not only has the right, but it also his duty to do so as long as he lives (Revelation 22:17). The spread of the gospel is left, not to a few, but to all the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ: according to the measure of grace entrusted to him by the Holy Spirit, each man is obligated to minister in his day and generation, both to the church, and among unbelievers. Indeed, this question goes beyond men, and even includes everyone of the opposite sex; whether believers are male or female, they are all obliged, when enabled by divine grace, to exert themselves to the utmost to impart and communicate the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our service, however, does not particularly need to take the form of preaching— certainly, in some cases it must not, for instance, in the case of females, whose public teachings is expressly forbidden (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34). Yet, if we have the ability to preach, we are bound to exercise it. In this lecture, however, I do not allude to occasional preaching, or any other form of ministry common to all the saints, but to the work and office of the bishop or elder, for which both teaching and bearing rule in the church are included, requiring the dedication of a man's entire life to spiritual work, and separation from every secular calling (2 Timothy 2:4); and entitles the man to cast himself upon the church of God for his temporal supplies, since he gives up all his time, energies, and labors, for the good of those over whom he oversees (1 Corinthians 9:11; 1 Timothy 5:18). Peter addresses such a man in the words, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers" (2 Peter 5:2). Now, everyone in a church cannot rule, or oversee— there must be some to be ruled and overseen; and we believe that the Holy Spirit appoints some to act as overseers in the church of God, while others are made willing to be watched over for their good. All are not called to labor in word and doctrine, or to be elders, or to exercise the office of bishop; nor should all aspire to such works, since the gifts necessary are nowhere promised to every single person; yet, those should addict themselves to such important engagements who feel, like the apostle, that they have received this ministry (2 Corinthians 4:1). No man may enter into the

sheepfold as an under-shepherd uninvited; he must have an eye to the chief Shepherd, and wait upon his command and calling nod. If a man ever steps forward as God's ambassador, he must wait for the call from above; and if he does not, but instead rushes into the sacred office, the Lord will say of him, and others like him, "Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all," says the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:32).

By reference to the Old Testament, you will find the messengers of God in the old dispensation claiming to hold commissions from Jehovah. Isaiah tells us that one of the seraphim touched his lips with a live coal from the altar, and the voice of the Lord said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"<sup>1</sup> Then the prophet said, "Here am I! Send me." He did not run before he had been especially visited by the Lord and qualified for his mission. "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"<sup>2</sup> were words that had not yet been spoken, yet their sacred meaning was clearly understood. Jeremiah details his call in his first chapter:

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

Then said I: "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth."

But the LORD said to me: "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you," says the LORD. Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant."

—Jeremiah 1:4-10

Differing in its outward form, but with the same intent and significance, was the commission of Ezekiel. It happened like this in his own words:

And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you." Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me. And He said to me: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 6:8

<sup>2</sup> Romans 10:15

rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.”

—Ezekiel 2:1-3

Moreover He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat that scroll. And He said to me, “Son of man, feed your belly, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you.”

So I ate it, and it was in my mouth like honey in sweetness.

And He said to me: “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.”

—Ezekiel 3:1-4

Daniel’s call to prophesy, although it was not recorded, is abundantly proved by the visions granted to him, and the overwhelming favor that he had with the Lord, both in his public actions and his private meditations. It is not necessary to review the calls of all the other prophets, because they all claimed to speak with, “thus saith the Lord” (KJV). In the present dispensation [of the church], all the saints share in the priesthood of believers;<sup>3</sup> but to prophesy, or what resembles it, namely, for someone to be given completely to the proclamation of the gospel through the moving of the Holy Spirit is, as a matter of fact, the gift and calling of only a comparatively small number of individuals. Certainly, these need to be as sure of the rightfulness of their position, just as the prophets were; and yet, how can they justify their office, unless it is by a similar call?

It is unnecessary to imagine that such calls are mere delusions, and that none are separated in this day and age for the particular work of teaching and overseeing the church, because the very names given to ministers in the New Testament imply a previous call to their work. The apostle says, “Now then, we are ambassadors for God” (2 Corinthians 5:20); but does not the very soul of the ambassador’s office lie in the appointment that is made by the king represented? An ambassador that has not been sent would be a laughing-stock. Men who dare to openly declare that they are ambassadors for Christ must feel most solemnly that the Lord has “committed” them to “the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). If it is argued that this passage of Scripture is restricted to

---

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 2:5, 9

the apostles, I answer that the epistle is written, not only in the name of Paul, but also of Timothy,<sup>4</sup> and therefore, includes other ministry offices besides that of apostle. In the first epistle to the Corinthians we read, “Let a man so consider us [the us here meaning Paul and Sosthenes of 1 Corinthians 1:1], as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). Surely a steward must hold his office from the Master. He cannot be a steward merely because he chooses to be one, or is likewise regarded by others. If any of us should elect ourselves stewards to the Marquis of Westminster,<sup>5</sup> and proceed to deal with his property, we would have our mistake pointed out to us very quickly in the most convincing way. There must evidently be authority before a man can legally become a bishop, “a steward of God” (Titus 1:7).

The Apocalyptic title of Angel (Revelation 2:1) means messenger; and how shall men be Christ’s messengers, unless it comes by His election and ordination? If the reference of the word Angel to the minister is questioned, we would be glad to have it shown that it can relate to anyone else. To whom would the Spirit write in the church as its representative, unless it was someone in a position resembling that of the presiding elder?

Titus was directed to make full proof of his ministry— there was surely something to prove. Some “will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21). The Master is not to be denied the choice of the vessels He uses, He will still say of certain men as He did of Saul of Tarsus, “He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). When our Lord ascended on high, He gave gifts to men, because it is worth noting that these gifts were men that were set apart for various works: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11); from which it is evident that certain individuals are, as the result of our Lord’s ascension, bestowed upon the churches as pastors; they are given by God,

---

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:1

<sup>5</sup> Also spelled *Marquess of Westminster*, this title was first bestowed upon Robert Grosvenor in 1831 at the coronation of King William IV. Robert Grosvenor’s son became the second Marquess, and his grandson, Hugh Lupus Grosvenor, became the third Marquess, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Grosvenor. In 1874, Queen Victoria created the title of “Duke of Westminster” and bestowed it upon Hugh Lupus Grosvenor; and he (and his progeny to follow) was hereafter known as the Duke of Westminster.

and consequently not self-elevated to their position. Brethren, I trust you may be able to one day speak to the flock over whom “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28), and I pray that every one of you have received it of the Lord (Galatians 1:1). May that ancient promise be fulfilled in you: “And I will give you pastors according to Mine heart” (Jeremiah 3:15, KJV). “I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them” (Jeremiah 23:4). May the Lord Himself fulfill His own declaration in each and every one of you: “I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night” (Isaiah 62:6). May you take out the precious from the vile, and so be as God’s mouth (Jeremiah 15:9). May the Lord declare the savor of the knowledge of Jesus by you in every place, and make you unto “God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” (2 Corinthians 2:14-15). Having a priceless treasure in earthen vessels, may the excellence of the divine power rest upon you,<sup>6</sup> and so may you both glorify God and be innocent of the blood of all men.<sup>7</sup> As the Lord Jesus went up to the Mount and called to Him those He wanted, and then sent them forth to preach (Mark 3:13), likewise may He select you, call you upward to commune with Himself, and send you forth as His elect servants to bless both the church and the world.

How can a young man know whether he is called or not? That is a serious question, and I desire to treat it most solemnly. O, that we would have divine guidance in doing this! That hundreds have missed their way, and stumbled against a pulpit is sadly evident from the fruitless ministries and decaying churches that surround us. It is a fearful calamity to a man to miss his calling; and, to the church he imposes upon, his mistake involves an affliction of the most grievous kind. It would be a curious and painful subject to reflect upon— the frequency with which reasonable men mistake the end of their existence, and aim at objects that they were never intended to pursue. The writer who wrote the following words must surely have had his eye upon many poorly filled pulpits:

“Declare, ye sages, if ye find  
 ‘Mongst animals of every kind,  
 Of each condition, sort, and size  
 From whales and elephants to flies,

---

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:7

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:15; Ezekiel 3:18-21; Acts 20:26

A creature that mistakes his plan,  
And errs so constantly as man!

“Each kind pursues its proper good,  
And seeks enjoyment, rest, and food,  
As nature points, and never errs  
In what it chooses or prefers;  
Man only blunders, though possessed  
Of reason far above the rest.

“Descend to instances and try:  
An ox will not attempt to fly,  
Or leave his pasture in the wood  
With fishes to explore the flood.  
Man only acts, of every creature,  
In opposition to his nature.”

When I think upon all the infinite mischief that can result from a mistake as to our vocation for the Christian pastorate, I feel overwhelmed with fright for fear that any of us should be slack in examining our credentials; and I would prefer that we doubted too often and examined too frequently, than that we should become useless and troublesome obstructions, not only taking up space, but also impeding the way for others.

There are many methods by which a man may test his call to the ministry if he earnestly desired to do so. It is absolutely critical that a man not enter the ministry until he has made a solemn quest and trial of himself regarding this point. His own personal salvation being secure, he must investigate everything as to the further matter of his call to office; the first is vital for him as a Christian; the second equally vital to him as a pastor. A man who professes to be a Christian without conversion is similar to a pastor who has not been called to that office by Jesus Christ: in both cases there is a name and nothing more.

1. The first sign of the heavenly call is ***an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work***. In order to have a true call to the ministry there must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst for telling others what God has done to our own souls; what if I call it a kind of *στοργη*,<sup>8</sup> such as birds have for rearing their young when the season arrives; when the mother-bird would

---

<sup>8</sup> *στοργη* (*storge*) is a Greek word that carries the meaning of natural affection or that kind of love expressed in nature, as mother to child, or hen to chick. You will not find this Greek word in the Bible.

sooner die than leave her nest. One who knew him intimately said it of Alleine, that “he was infinitely and insatiably greedy of the conversion of souls.”<sup>9</sup> When he could have had a fellowship at his university, he preferred to be its chaplain instead because he was “inspired with an impatience to be occupied in direct ministerial work.” To one who sought his judgment, a minister gave this especially wise advice, “Do not enter the ministry if you can help it.” If any student in this room could be content to be a newspaper editor, or a grocer, or a farmer, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or a senator, or a king, in the name of heaven and earth, let him go his way; he is not the man in whom dwells the Spirit of God in its fullness, because a man so filled with God would utterly wear himself out pursuing any other occupation than that for which his innermost soul pants. On the other hand, if you can say that for all the wealth of both East and West Indies you could not, and dare not, embrace any other calling so that it sets preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ aside, then count on it, if other things are equally satisfactory, you have the signs of this apostleship. We must feel in such a way that we say, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”<sup>10</sup> We must feel that the Word of God is like a fire in our bones, otherwise, if we take up and perform this ministry, we will be unhappy in it, we will be unable to bear the self-denials that come with it, and we will be of little service to those of whom we are trying to serve. I speak of self-denials, and I know what I’m talking about here; because the true pastor’s work is full of them, and without a love to his calling, he will soon give up, give in, and surrender. He will either leave the drudgery of it all, or else he will move on with discontentment, burdened with monotony that is as tiring as that of a blind horse in a mill.

“There is a comfort in the strength of love;  
 “Twill make a thing endurable which else  
 Would break the heart”

Clothed with that love, you will be fearless; stripped of that truth that is more than just a mere belt for your irresistible vocation, you will rot in wretchedness.

This desire must be a *thoughtful* one. It should not be a sudden impulse

---

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Alliene (1634-1668) was a Puritan pastor, author, and passionate evangelist. He was imprisoned for his “non-conformist” faith during the reign of England’s Charles II.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:16

that has not been accompanied with careful consideration. It should be the outgrowth of our heart in its best moments, the object of our reverent aspirations, the subject of our most fervent prayers. It must continue with us when tempting offers of wealth and comfort come in to conflict with it, and remain as a calm, clear-minded, determined purpose after everything has been rightly weighed and estimated, and the cost thoroughly counted. When living as a child at my grandfather's house in the country, I saw a group of hunters in their red coats riding through his fields as they chased a fox. I was delighted! My little heart was excited; I was ready to follow the hounds over every hedge and ditch. I have always felt a natural taste for that sort of thing, and as a child, when asked what I would be; I usually said that I was going to be a hunter. Truly, a fine profession! Many young men have had the same idea of being parsons as I had in being a hunter— merely a childish notion; that they would like the coat and blowing the horn; the honor, the respect, the ease; and they are probably even foolish enough to think, the riches of ministry. (They must be truly ignorant beings if they look for wealth in connection with the Baptist ministry.) The fascination of the preacher's office is very great to weak minds, and therefore, I earnestly warn all young men not to mistake whim for inspiration, and a childish preference for a call of the Holy Spirit.

Mark well, that the desire I have spoken of must be **thoroughly disinterested**. If a man can detect any other motive than the glory of God and the good of souls, after the most earnest self-examination in seeking the pastor's office, he had better turn aside from it at once; for the Lord will utterly despise the bringing of buyers and sellers into His temple:<sup>11</sup> the introduction of anything mercenary, even in the smallest degree, will be like the fly in the pot of ointment, and will spoil the entire perfume.<sup>12</sup>

This desire should be one that **continues with us**, a passion that does not collapse under the test of trial, a longing from which it is quite impossible for us to escape, although we may have tried to do so. It is a desire, in fact, that grows more intense as the years pass until it becomes a yearning, a starving, and a wasting away to proclaim the Word. This intense desire is such a noble and

---

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; John 2:15-17

<sup>12</sup> Ecclesiastes 10:1

beautiful thing that whenever I see it glowing in any young man's bosom, I am always slow to discourage him, even though I may have my doubts about his abilities. It may be needful, for reasons to be given to you later, to restrain the flame, but it should be reluctantly and wisely done. I have such a deep respect for this "fire in the bones" that if I did not feel it myself, I would leave the ministry at once.<sup>13</sup> If you do not feel the consecrated glow, I beg you to return to your homes and serve God in your proper place; but if the coals of the juniper tree most assuredly blaze within you, do not extinguish them, unless other considerations of great importance should indeed prove to you that the desire is not a fire of heavenly origin.

2. In the second place, combined with the earnest desire to become a pastor, there must be an ***ability to teach, and some measure of the other qualities needful for the office of a public instructor.***<sup>14</sup> To prove his call, a man must successfully test these. I do not claim that a man must preach as well as Robert Hall did in his later days the first time he gets up to speak.<sup>15</sup> If he preaches no worse than that great man did at first, he must not be condemned. You are aware that Robert Hall broke down altogether three times and cried, "If this does not humble me, nothing will." Some of the noblest speakers were not the most fluent in their earlier days of ministry. Even Cicero suffered from a weak voice and a difficulty of utterance at first.<sup>16</sup> Still, a man must not consider that he is called to preach until he has proved that he can speak. God certainly has not created behemoth to fly; and should leviathan have a strong desire to ascend with the lark, it would evidently be an unwise aspiration, since he is not equipped with wings. If a man is called to preach, he will be gifted with a degree of speaking ability, which he will cultivate and increase. If the gift of public speaking is not there in a measure at first, it is not likely that it will ever be developed.

I have heard of a gentleman who had a most intense desire to preach and forced his requests upon his minister until, after a huge number of refusals, he

---

<sup>13</sup> See Lamentations 1:13

<sup>14</sup> 1 Timothy 3:2

<sup>15</sup> As a Baptist pastor, Robert Hall (1764-1861) honed his oratory skills during his ministry at St. Andrew's Street Baptist Chapel in Cambridge (1791-1806), receiving recognition for the remainder of his years as one of the most brilliant and powerful preachers in England.

<sup>16</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43BC), a philosopher and Roman statesman, is widely considered one of Rome's greatest orators.

received permission to preach a trial sermon. That opportunity was the end of his importunity, because upon announcing his text, he found himself destitute of every idea but one, which he delivered feelingly, and then, stepped down from the platform. "My brethren," he said afterward, "if any of you think it an easy thing to preach, I advise you to come up here and have all the conceit taken out of you." The test of your powers will go far to reveal to you your deficiency, if you do not have the needed ability. I know of nothing better. We must give ourselves a fair trial in this matter, or we cannot know whether God has call us or not with any assurance; and during the probation we must often ask ourselves whether, on the whole, we can hope to edify others with such discourses.

We must, however, do much more than put it to our own conscience and judgment, for we are poor judges. A certain class of brethren have a great ability for discovering that they have been very wonderfully and divinely helped in their public speeches; I would envy them their glorious liberty and self-complacency if there were any basis for it. For, sadly, I very frequently have to lament and mourn over my non-success and shortcomings as a speaker. We cannot depend upon our own opinion very much, but much may be learned from wise, spirit-minded persons. It is by no means a law that ought to bind every person, but still, it is a good old custom in many of our country churches for the young man who seeks the ministry to preach before the church. It can hardly ever be a pleasant ordeal for the aspiring youth, and in many cases, it will hardly be a very edifying exercise for the people; but still, it may prove to be a most useful piece of discipline and save the public exposure of rampant ignorance. The church book at Arnsby contains the following entry:

*A short account of the Call of Robert Hall, Junior, to the work of the Ministry, by the Church at Arnsby, August 13, 1780.*

"The said Robert Hall was born at Arnsby, May 2d, 1764; and was even from his childhood, not only serious, and given to secret prayer *before he could speak plain*, but was wholly inclined to the work of the ministry. He began to compose hymns before he was quite seven years old, and therein discovered marks of piety, deep thought, and genius. Between eight and nine years he made several hymns, which were much admired by many, one of which was printed in the Gospel Magazine about that time. He wrote his thoughts on various religious subjects, and select portions of Scripture. He was likewise possessed of an intense inclination for learning, and made such progress that the country master under whom he was could not instruct him

any further. He was then sent to Northampton boarding school, under the care of Rev. John Ryland, where he continued about one year and a-half, and made great progress in Latin and Greek. In October, 1778, he went to the Academy at Bristol, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Evans; and on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1780, was sent out to the ministry by this church, being sixteen years and three months old. The manner in which the church obtained satisfaction with his abilities for the great work, was his speaking in his turn at conference meetings from various portions of Scripture; in which, and in prayer, he had borne a part for upwards of four years before; and having when at home, at their request, preached on the Lord's-day mornings, to their great satisfaction. They therefore earnestly and unanimously requested his being in a solemn manner set apart to public employ. Accordingly, on the day aforesaid, he was examined by his father before the church, respecting his inclination, motives, and end, in reference to the ministry, and was likewise desired to make a declaration of his religious sentiments. All which being done, to the entire satisfaction of the church, they therefore set him apart by lifting up their right hands, and by solemn prayer. His father then delivered a discourse from 2 Tim. ii. 1. 'Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.' Being thus sent forth, he preached in the afternoon from 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. 'May the Lord bless him, and grant him great success!'<sup>17</sup>

Considerable weight is to be given to the judgment of men and women who live near to God, and in most instances their verdict will not be a mistaken one. Yet, this appeal is neither final nor infallible, and is only to be estimated in proportion to the intelligence and holiness of those consulted. I remember quite well how earnestly I was discouraged from preaching by as godly a Christian matron as ever breathed. I attempted to estimate the value of her opinion with honesty and patience— but her opinion was outweighed by the judgment of persons with wider experience. Young men in doubt will do quite well to take their wisest friends with them the next time they go out to the country chapel or village meeting-room and attempt to deliver the Word. I have noted— and our venerable friend, Mr. Rogers has observed the same— that you, gentlemen, students as a body, in your judgment of one another, are seldom wrong, if ever. There has hardly ever been an instance, considering everyone in the house, where the general opinion of the entire College concerning a brother has been erroneous. Men are not quite as incapable of forming an opinion of each other as they are sometimes supposed to be. Meeting as you do in class, in the prayer meeting, in conversation, and in various religious engagements, you measure

---

<sup>17</sup> J. M. Morris, *Biographical Recollections of the Rev. Robert Hall, A.M.*, 1833

each other; and a wise man will be slow to set aside the verdict of the house.

I could not complete this point if I did not add this: that mere ability to edify, and aptitude to teach, is not enough. There must be other talents to complete the pastoral character. Sound judgment and solid experience must instruct you. Gentle manners and loving affections must govern you. Firmness and courage must be manifest; and tenderness and sympathy must not be lacking. Administrative gifts will be as necessary to ruling well as instructive gifts are in teaching well. You must be adapted to lead, prepared to endure, and able to persevere. In grace, you should be head and shoulders above the rest of the people, able to be their father and counselor. Carefully read the qualifications of a bishop, given in 1 Timothy 3:2-7, and in Titus 1:6-9. If such gifts and graces are not in you abundantly, it may be possible for you to succeed as an evangelist, but as a pastor to a local congregation of souls, you will be of no account.

3. In order to further test a man's call, after a little exercise of his gifts, such as I have already spoken of, ***he must see a measure of conversion-work going on under his efforts***, or he may conclude that he has made a mistake, and therefore, he may go back by the best way he can. We should not expect that we will be alerted to success after the first, or even the twentieth effort in public; and a man may even give himself a life trial of preaching if he feels called to do so, but it seems to me, that as a man is to be set apart for the ministry, his commission has not been sealed until souls have been won to the knowledge of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit's using him as the instrument to accomplish such. As a worker, he is to work on whether he succeeds or not, but as a minister he cannot be sure of his vocation until the results are apparent. How my heart jumped for joy when I heard the news of my first convert! I could never be satisfied with a full congregation and the kind expressions of friends; I longed to hear that hearts had been broken, that tears had been seen streaming from penitent eyes.

How I have rejoiced like an army commander that found great spoil over a workman's wife who confessed that she felt the guilt of sin, and had found the Savior through my preaching on Sunday afternoon: I can see the house where she lives right now; and believe me, it always appears very scenic and charming. I remember quite well her being received into the church, and her dying, and her

going home to heaven. She was the first seal of my ministry, and I can assure you, a very precious one indeed. No mother was ever more full of happiness at the site of her firstborn son as I was at the site of that first convert. Then, I could have sung the song of the Virgin Mary, because my soul magnified the Lord for remembering my low estate, and giving me the great honor to do a work for which all generations would call me blessed, for so I counted the conversion of one soul.

There must be some measure of conversion-work in your irregular labors before you can believe that preaching is to be your life's work. Remember the Lord's words by the prophet Jeremiah; they are all very much to the point, and should alarm all fruitless preachers: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings" (Jeremiah 23:21-22). It is a marvel to me how men continue at ease to preach year after year without conversions. Have they no bowels of compassion for others? Have they no sense of responsibility upon themselves? Do they dare blame the Master by their vain misrepresentation of the divine sovereignty? Or is it their believe that Paul plants and Apollos waters, and that God gives no increase? Their talents, their philosophy, their rhetoric, and even their orthodoxy are vain without the signs following. How are they sent of God who brings no men to God? Prophets whose words are powerless, sowers whose seed all withers, fishermen who catch no fish, soldiers who inflict no wounds on the enemy— are these God's men? Surely, it would be better to be a mud-raker or a chimney sweep than to stand in the ministry as an utterly barren tree. The most lowly occupation gives some benefit to mankind, but the wretched man who occupies a pulpit and never glorifies his God by conversions is a blank, a blot, an eyesore, a mischief. He is not worth the salt he eats, much less the bread; and if he writes to the newspapers to complain of the smallness of his salary, his conscience, if he has any, might reply, "And what you have is undeserved." There may be times of drought; yes, and years of leanness may consume the former years of usefulness, but still, there will be fruit for the most part, and fruit to the glory of God. Meanwhile, the transient barrenness will fill the soul with inexpressible anguish. Brethren, if the

Lord gives you no zeal for souls, keep yourself confined to work involving the lapstone<sup>18</sup> or the trowel,<sup>19</sup> but avoid the pulpit if you value your heart's peace and your future salvation.

4. A step beyond all this is necessary in our inquiry, however. The will of the Lord concerning pastors is made known through the prayerful judgment of His church. It is needful as a proof of your vocation that ***your preaching should be acceptable to the people of God.*** God usually opens doors of utterance for those whom He calls to speak in His name. Impatience would push open the door, or break it down, but faith waits upon the Lord, and in due time her opportunity is rewarded. When the opportunity comes, then our test comes. Standing up to preach, our spirit will be judged by the assembly, and if it is condemned, or if, as a general rule, the church is not edified, the conclusion may not be disputed, that we are not sent of God. The signs and marks of a true bishop are laid down in the Word for the guidance of the church; and if in following such guidelines the brethren do not see those qualifications in us, and do not elect us to that ministry office, it is plain enough that, however well we might evangelize, the office of the pastor is not for us. Churches are not always wise, nor do they always judge in power of the Holy Spirit, but many of them judge after the flesh yet, I would sooner accept the opinion of a company of the Lord's people than my own upon such a personal subject as my own gifts and graces. At any rate, whether you value the verdict of the church or not, one thing is certain, that none of you can be pastors without the loving consent of the flock; and therefore, this will be a practical indicator for you, even if not a correct one. If your call from the Lord is a real one you will not be silent for very long. As surely as a man wants his hour, so surely the hour wants its man. The church of God is always urgently in need of living ministers; to her, a man is always more precious than the gold of Ophir. Formal officials lack and suffer hunger, but the anointed of the Lord need never to be without a parish, because there are quick ears that will know them by their speech, and ready hearts to welcome them to their appointed place. Be fit for your work, and you will never be out of it. Do not run around inviting

---

<sup>18</sup> The lapstone, or lap stone, was a stone placed in the lap of a shoemaker or cobbler. It was upon the lapstone that the shoemaker beat leather into soft, workable material.

<sup>19</sup> The trowel was a handheld spade used by either gardener for his work in the soil, or by the mason for his work with mortar and bricks.

yourselves to preach here and there; be more concerned with your ability than your opportunity, and more serious about your walk with God than about either [your ability or opportunity]. The sheep will know the God-sent shepherd. The Gatekeeper of the fold will open to you, and the flock will know your voice.

At the time of this lecture was first delivered, I had not read John Newton's admirable letter to a friend on this subject. It so nearly corresponds with my own thoughts, that at the risk of being thought a copycat, and I certainly am not in this case, I will read you the letter:

“Your case reminds me of my own; my first desires towards the ministry were attended with great uncertainties and difficulties, and the perplexity of my own mind was heightened by the various and opposite judgments of my friends. The advice I have to offer is the result of painful experience and exercise, and for this reason, perhaps, may not be unacceptable to you. I pray our gracious Lord to make it useful.

“I was long distressed, as you are, about what was or was not a proper call to ministry. It now seems to me an easy point to solve; but, perhaps, it will not be so to you, till the Lord shall make it clear to yourself in your case. I have not room to say so much as I could. In brief, I think it principally includes three things:

“1. A warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service. I apprehend the man who is once moved by the Spirit of God to this work, will prefer it, if attainable, to thousands of gold and silver; so that, though he is at times intimidated by a sense of its importance and difficulty, compared with his own great insufficiency (or it is to be presumed a call of this sort, if indeed from God, will be accompanied with humility and self-abasement), yet he cannot give it up. I hold it a good rule to inquire in this point, whether the desire to preach is most fervent in our most lively and spiritual frames, and when we are most laid in the dust before the Lord? If so, it is a good sign. But if, as is sometimes the case, a person is very earnest to be a preacher to others, when he finds but little hungerings and thirstings after grace in his own soul, it is then to be feared his zeal springs rather from a selfish principle than from the Spirit of God.

“2. Besides this affectionate desire and readiness to preach, there must in due season appear some competent sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance. Surely, if the Lord sends a man to teach others, he will furnish him with the means. I believe many have intended well in setting up for preachers, who yet went beyond or before their call in so doing. The main difference between a minister and a private Christian seems to consist in those ministerial gifts, which are imparted to him, not for his own sake, but for the edification of others. But then I say these are to appear in due season; they are not to be expected instantaneously, but gradually, in the use of proper means. They are necessary for the discharge of the ministry, but not necessary as prerequisites to warrant our desires after it. In your case, you are

young, and have time before you; therefore, I think you need not as yet perplex yourself with inquiring if you have these gifts already. It is sufficient if your desire is fixed, and you are willing, in the way of praying and diligence, to wait upon the Lord for them; as yet you need them not.<sup>20</sup>

“3. That which finally evidences a proper call is a correspondent opening in providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place, of actually entering upon the work. And until the coincidence arrives, you must not expect to be always clear from hesitation in your own mind. The principal caution on this head is not to be too hasty in catching at first appearances. If it be the Lord’s will to bring you into His ministry, He has already appointed your place and service, and though you know it not at present, you shall at proper time. If you had the talents of an angel, you could do no good with them till His hour is come, and till He leads you to the people who He has determined to bless by your means. It is very difficult to restrain ourselves with the bounds of prudence here, when our zeal is warm: a sense of the love of Christ upon our hearts, and a tender compassion for poor sinners, is ready to prompt us to break out too soon; but he that believeth shall not make haste. I was about five years under this constraint; sometimes I thought I must preach, though it was in the streets. I listened to everything that seemed plausible, and to many things which were not so. But the Lord graciously, and as it were insensibly, hedged up my way with thorns; otherwise, if I had been left to my own spirit, I should have put it quite out of my power to have been brought into such a sphere of usefulness, as He in His good time has been please to lead me to. And I can now see clearly, that at the time I would first have gone out, though my intention was, I hope, good in the main, yet I overrated myself, and had not that spiritual judgment and experience which are requisite for so great a service.”

Thus, many of these things may satisfy, but the same subjects will be before you if I detail a little of my experience in dealing with those earnestly seeking to enter the ministry. I have to constantly fulfill the duty that fell to the lot of Cromwell’s Triers.<sup>21</sup> I have to form an opinion as to the advisability of aiding certain men in their attempts to become pastors. This is a most responsible duty, and one that requires extraordinary care. Of course, I do not set myself up to judge whether a man shall enter the ministry or not, but my examination merely

---

<sup>20</sup> Mr. Spurgeon’s own footnote is inserted here: “We should hesitate to speak precisely in this manner. The gifts must be somewhat apparent before the desire should be encouraged. Still, in the main, we agree with Mr. Newton.”

<sup>21</sup> Named for England’s Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, Cromwell’s Triers, or the Board of Commissioners, was established in 1653 by Lord Cromwell so that men truly called as parish pastors could be recognized and appointed by the board. The board was made up of 38 members from Presbyterians, Independents, and a few Baptists. Among the board members were Joseph Caryl, Thomas Manton, Dr. Thomas Goodwin, and Dr. John Owen.

aims at answering the question whether this institution will help him, or leave him to his own resources. Certain charitable neighbors accuse us of having “a pastor factory” here, but the charge is not true at all. We never tried to make a minister, and would fail if we did. We do not receive anyone into the College except those who profess to be ministers already. It would be closer to the truth if they called me a pastor killer, because a significant number of beginners have received their final discharge from me; and my conscience is clear and I am fully at ease in reflecting upon what I have done. It has always been a hard task for me to discourage a hopeful young brother who has applied for admission to the College. My heart has always leaned to the kindest side, but duty to the churches has compelled me to judge with severe discrimination. After hearing what the candidate has had to say, having read his testimonials and seen his replies to questions, when I have felt convinced that the Lord had not called him, I have been obliged to tell him so. Certain of the cases are types of all. Young brethren apply who earnestly desire to enter the ministry, but it is painfully apparent that their main motive is an ambitious desire to shine among men. These men are, from a common point of view, to be commended for aspiring; but then the pulpit is never to be the ladder by which ambition is to climb. Had such men entered the army they would never have been satisfied until they had reached the front rank, because they are determined to push their way up— all very praiseworthy and very proper so far; but they have felt the budding of genius, and have regarded themselves as greater than ordinary persons, and therefore, they have looked upon the ministry as a platform upon which to display their supposed abilities. Whenever this has been visible I have felt bound to leave the man “to gang his ain gate,” as the Scotch say;<sup>22</sup> believing that such spirits always amount to nothing if they enter the Lord’s service. We find that we have nothing to glory in concerning this, and if we had, the very worst place in which to hang it out would be a pulpit; because there we are brought daily to feel our own insignificance and nothingness.

Men, who since conversion, have betrayed great feebleness of mind and are readily led to embrace strange doctrines, or to fall into evil company and grow

---

<sup>22</sup> To “gang your ain gate” means to “go your own road” or “have your own way” (from *A Dictionary of Lowland Scotch*, by Dr. Charles Mackay, 1888; p.65).

sin, I never can find it in my heart to encourage to enter the ministry, let their professions be what they will. Let them stay in the rear ranks if they are truly penitent. Unstable as water, they will not excel.

So, too, those who cannot endure hardness, but must be handled with kid gloves;<sup>23</sup> I refer elsewhere. We want soldiers, not fops,<sup>24</sup> earnest laborers, not elegant loafers. Men, who have done nothing up to their time of application to the College, are told to earn their spurs before they are publicly dubbed as knights. Fervent lovers of souls do not wait until they are trained; they serve their Lord at once.

Certain good men have pleaded with me, men who are distinguished by enormous zeal and forcefulness, as well as conspicuous absence of brains; brethren that would talk forever and ever upon nothing— who would stamp and thump the Bible, and get nothing out of it at all; earnest, awfully earnest, mountains in the most painful kind of labor, yet nothing comes of it at all, not even the *ridiculus mus*.<sup>25</sup> There are zealots abroad that are not capable of conceiving or uttering five consecutive thoughts, whose capacity is especially narrow and their conceit is exceptionally broad. These can hammer, and bawl, and rave, and tear, and rage, but the noise all arises from the hollowness of the drum. I imagine that these brethren will do just as well without education as with it, and therefore I have usually declined their applications.

Another exceedingly large class of men seek the pulpit and they do not know why. They cannot teach and will not learn, and yet gladly become ministers. Like the man who slept on Parnassus, and afterward imagined that he was a poet,<sup>26</sup> they have had enough presumption once to thrust a sermon upon an audience, and now nothing will do for them but preaching. They are so hasty to quit sewing

---

<sup>23</sup> Though the expression, “handle with kid gloves” was used in America as recently as the 1960s, it is not as common today. It means “to handle in a gentle, delicate, or gingerly manner” (from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>24</sup> FOP, *n.*, “A vain man of weak understanding and much ostentation; one whose ambition is to gain admiration by showy dress and pertness; a gay trifling man; a coxcomb” (from *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*).

<sup>25</sup> This comes from a Latin phrase, *parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus*, meaning “The mountains are in labor; a ridiculous mouse will be born.” What Mr. Spurgeon says here is that these empty, prattling men have labor pains far worse than the mountain, yet they don’t even give birth to the “ridiculous mouse.”

<sup>26</sup> Mount Parnassus is a limestone mountain in central Greece and a significant location in Greek mythology, i.e., the home of the Muses, the nine goddesses that inspire the arts.

garments that they will tear the church of which they are members, in order to accomplish their own design. The counter is distasteful, and a pulpit cushion is coveted; they are weary of the scales and weights, and find it absolutely necessary to give their hands a try at hanging the sanctuary in the balance. Such men, like raging waves of the sea, usually bring forth foam to their own shame, and we are happy when we ask one of them to leave.

Physical infirmities raise a question about the call of some excellent men. I would not, like Eusthenes,<sup>27</sup> judge men by their features, but their general physique is a decisive factor. That narrow chest does not indicate a man formed for public speech. You may think it odd, but still I feel very assured that when a man has a contracted chest, with no distance between his shoulders, the all-wise Creator did not intend him to preach habitually. If He had meant for him to speak, He would have given him, in some measure, a wide enough chest to yield a reasonable amount of lung force. When the Lord means a creature to run, He gives it nimble legs, and if He means another creature to preach, He will give it suitable lungs. A brother who has to pause in the middle of a sentence and work his air pump should ask himself whether there might be some other occupation for which he is better adapted. A man who can scarcely get through a sentence without pain can hardly be called to “Cry aloud and spare not.”<sup>28</sup> There may be exceptions, but is there not merit in the general rule? Brethren with defective mouths and imperfect articulation are not usually called to preach the gospel. The same applies to brethren with no palate, or an imperfect one.

Application was received some short time ago from a young man who had a sort of rotary action of his jaw of the most painful kind, for the one who must look upon it. His pastor commended him as a very holy young man, who had been the means of bringing some to Christ, and he expressed the hope that I would receive him, but I could not see the decency of it. I could not have looked at him while preaching without laughing, even if all the gold of Tarshish had been my reward; and in all probability, nine out of ten of his hearers would have probably been more sensitive than I. A man with a big tongue that filled up his mouth and

---

<sup>27</sup> Eusthenes lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. and held to a philosophy known as physiognomy. Physiognomy is the assessment of a person's character or personality from that person's outward appearance.

<sup>28</sup> See Isaiah 58:1

caused indistinguishable words; another without teeth; another who stuttered; another who could not pronounce all the alphabet; I have had the pain of declining on the basis that God had not given them those physical appliances that are, as the prayer-book would put it, “generally necessary.”

One brother I have encountered— one did I say? I have met ten, twenty, a hundred brethren, who have pleaded that they were sure, quite sure, that they were called to the ministry— they were quite certain of it, because they had failed in everything else. This is a sort of model story: “Sir, I was put into a lawyer’s office, but I could never bear the confinement, and I could not feel at home studying law; Providence clearly stopped up my road, for I lost my situation.”

“And what did you do then?”

“Why, sir, I was induced to open a grocer’s shop.”

“And did you prosper?”

“Well, I do not think, sir, I was ever meant for trade, and the Lord seemed quite to shut my way up there, for I failed and was in great difficulties. Since then, I have done a little in a Life Insurance agency, and tried to get up a school, besides selling tea; yet, my path is hedged up, and something within me makes me feel that I ought to be a minister.”

My answer generally is, “Yes, I see; you have failed in everything else, and therefore, you think the Lord has especially endowed you for His service; but I am afraid that you have forgotten that the ministry needs the very best of men, and not those who cannot do anything else.” A man who would succeed as a preacher would probably do quite well as a grocer, or a lawyer, or anything else. A really valuable minister would have excelled at anything. There is scarcely anything impossible to a man who can keep a congregation together for years, and be the means for edifying them for hundreds of consecutive Sabbaths. He must be possessed of some abilities and be, by no means, a fool or a ne’er-do-well. Jesus Christ deserves the best men to preach His Cross, and not the empty-headed and shiftless folk.

One you gentleman with whose presence I was once honored, has left his exquisite self etched in my memory. That same face of his looked like the title page to a whole volume of *conceit* and *deceit*. He sent a message to my office one Sabbath morning requesting that he must see me at once. I granted him

admission because of his audacity; and when he was before me he said, "Sir, I want to enter your College, and should like to enter it at once."

"Well, sir," I said, "I'm afraid we have no room for you at present, but your case shall be considered."

"But mine is a very remarkable case, sir," he replied. "You have probably never received an application like mine before."

"Very good, we'll see about that; the secretary will give you one of the application papers, and you can see me on Monday."

He came on that Monday, bringing with him his questions, which were answered in a most extraordinary manner. As to books, he claimed to have read all ancient and modern literature, and after presenting a huge list, he added, "This is only a selection; I have read most extensively in all departments." As to his preaching, he could produce the highest testimonials, yet he hardly thought they would be needed because a personal interview would convince me of his ability immediately.

His surprise was great when I said, "Sir, I am obliged to tell you that I cannot insult you by receiving you into our College, where we have none here but rather ordinary men; presidents, tutors, and students, are all men that have only achieved moderate success, and you would have to condescend too much in being among us."

He looked at me severely, and said with dignity, "Do you mean to say, that because I have an unusual genius, and have produced in myself a gigantic mind, such as is rarely seen, I am refused admittance into your College?"

"Yes," I replied, as calmly as I could, considering the overpowering awe that his genius inspired, "for that very reason."

"Then sir, you ought to allow me a trial of my preaching abilities; select me any text you like, or suggest any subject you please, and here in this very room I will speak upon it, or preach upon it without the slightest deliberation, and you will be surprised."

"No, thank you, I would rather not have the trouble of listening to you."

"Trouble, sir! I assure you it would be the greatest possible pleasure you could have."

I said it might be, but I felt myself unworthy of the privilege, and so wished

him a long farewell. The gentleman was unknown to me at the time, but he has since figured into the police court as being only half as clever.

We have occasionally had applications at which, perhaps you would be amazed, from men who are evidently fluent enough, and who answer all our questions very well, except those upon their doctrinal views, to which we have repeatedly been given this answer: "Mr. So-and-so is prepared to receive the doctrines of the College whatever they may be!" We never deliberate for a moment time in every one of these cases. "No" is the answer given instantaneously. I mention it because it illustrates our conviction that men are not called to the ministry who have no knowledge and no definite belief. When young fellows say that they have not made up their minds upon theology, they should go back to the Sunday school until they have. For a man to come shuffling into a College, pretending that he holds his mind open to any form of truth, and that he is eminently receptive, but has not settled in his mind such things as whether God has an election of grace, or whether He loves His people to the end, seems to me to be an absolute monstrosity. "Not a novice," says the apostle;<sup>29</sup> yet, a man who has not made up his mind on such points as these, is confessedly and egregiously "a novice," and should be relegated to the catechism class until he has learned the first truths of the gospel.

After all, gentlemen, we shall have to prove our call by the practical proof of our ministry in the afterlife,<sup>30</sup> and it will be a lamentable thing for us to begin our course without proper examination; because if so, we may have to leave it in disgrace. On the whole, experience is our surest test, and if God upholds us from year to year, and gives us His blessing, we do not need to make another test for our vocation. The fitness of our moral and spiritual beings will be tested by the labor of our ministry, and this is the most trustworthy of all tests. From some one or another I have heard in conversation of a plan adopted by Matthew Wilks for examining a young man who wanted to be a missionary;<sup>31</sup> the drift, if not the detail of the test, commends itself to my judgment, although it is not to my taste. The young man desired to go to India as a missionary in connection with the

---

<sup>29</sup> 1 Timothy 3:6

<sup>30</sup> James 3:1

<sup>31</sup> Matthew Wilks (1746-1829)— an English minister and one of the founders of the London Missionary Society.

London Missionary Society. Mr. Wilks was appointed to consider his fitness for such a post. He wrote to the young man, and told him to call upon him at six o'clock the next morning. The brother lived many miles away, but he was punctual, at the house at six o'clock. Mr. Wilks did not, however, enter the room until hours later. The brother waited patiently, although wondering a bit. At last Mr. Wilks arrived, and with his usual nasal tones, addressed the candidate in this way: "Well, young man, so you want to be a missionary?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?"

"Yes, sir, I hope I do."

"And have you had an education?"

"Yes, sir, a little."

"Well, now, we'll try you; can you spell 'cat'?"

The young man looked confused and hardly knew how to answer such a preposterous question. His mind evidently hesitated between resentment and submission, but in a moment he replied steadily, "C, a, t, cat."

"Very good," said Mr. Wilks; "now, can you spell 'dog'?" Our young martyr hesitated, but Mr. Wilks said in his coolest manner, "Oh, never mind; don't be bashful; you spelled the other word so well that I would think that you will be able to spell this: as high as the achievement is, it is not as elevated except that you might do it without blushing."

The youthful Job replied, "D, o, g, dog."

"Well, that is right; I see that you will do well in your spelling, and now for your arithmetic; how many are twice two?" It is amazing that Mr. Wilks did not receive "twice two" after the fashion of muscular Christianity, but the patient youth gave the right reply and was dismissed.<sup>32</sup>

At the committee meeting, Matthew Wilks said, "I cordially recommend that

---

<sup>32</sup> Mr. Spurgeon uses "twice two" as a humorous pun that may have something to do with Marquess of Queensbury boxing techniques, i.e., doubling up on a one-two combination, thus equaling four punches. My guess comes from Mr. Spurgeon's reference to "muscular Christianity" as the term and philosophy were born in England approximately 1857 by Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. Muscular Christianity emphasized the physical strength of Christian men, particularly in the arena of sports and athletic competition, so that those men who were sound of body might protect the weak, advance righteousness, and subdue the earth for the glory of God. The aggressive nature linked to the philosophy spawned some confrontational incidents, and even a few that may have resulted in minor physical altercations; hence, Mr. Spurgeon's use in this humorous anecdote.

young man; I have duly examined his testimonials and character, and besides that, I have given him a rare personal trial such as few could endure. I tested his self-denial, and he was up in the morning early; I tested his temper and humility: he can spell ‘cat’ and ‘dog,’ and can tell that ‘twice two’ is four,’ and he will do exceedingly well as a missionary.”

Now, what the old gentleman is said to have done with exceedingly bad taste, we may also do with ourselves with much propriety. We must examine whether we can endure browbeating, weariness, slander, jeering, and hardship; and whether we can be made the rejected refuse of all things, and be treated as nothing for Christ’s sake. If we can endure all these, we have some of those points that indicate the possession of the rare qualities appropriate in a true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. I seriously question whether some of us will find our vessels, when far out to sea, to be quite as seaworthy as we think them to be. O, my brethren, make determined work of it while you are still in this retreat; and labor diligently to prepare yourselves for your high calling. You will have enough trials, and woe to you if you do not go forth armed from head to foot with tested armor. You will have to run with those riding on horses; do not let the man on foot make you weary while you are in your preliminary studies. The devil is abroad, and with him are many. Prove your own selves, and may the Lord prepare you for the crucible and the furnace that assuredly await you. Your tribulation may not be as severe in every respect as those of Paul and his companions, but you must be ready for a similar ordeal. Let me read you his memorable words, and let me request that you pray while you hear them, that the Holy Spirit may strengthen you for all that lies ahead of you:

“We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”

**APPENDIX I**

[Title Page of our resource, Mr. Spurgeon's *Lectures*]

**LECTURES TO MY STUDENTS**

A

*SELECTION FROM THE ADDRESSES DELIVERED TO  
THE STUDENTS OF THE PASTORS' COLLEGE,  
METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, LONDON*

BY THE

**REV. C. H. SPURGEON***President*

FIRST SERIES

NEW YORK

ROBERT CARTER &amp; BROTHERS

530 BROADWAY

1890



*C. H. Springer*



