

Ministerial Confessions

Horatius Bonar:

We have been carnal and unspiritual. The tone of our life has been low and earthly. Associating too much and too intimately with the world, we have in a great measure become accustomed to its ways. Hence our spiritual tastes have been vitiated, our consciences blunted, and that sensitive tenderness of feeling has worn off and given place to an amount of callousness of which we once, in fresher days, believed ourselves incapable.

We have been selfish. We have shrunk from toil, difficulty and endurance. We have counted only our lives, and our temporal ease and comfort dear unto us. We have sought to please ourselves. We have been worldly and covetous. We have not presented ourselves unto God as "living sacrifices," laying ourselves, our lives, our substance, our time, our strength, our faculties, our all, upon His altar. We seem altogether to have lost sight of this self sacrificing principle on which even as Christians, but much more as ministers, we are called upon to act. We have had little idea of anything like sacrifice at all. Up to the point where a sacrifice was demanded, we may have been willing to go, but there we stood; counting it unnecessary, perhaps calling it imprudent and unadvised, to proceed further. Yet ought not the life of every Christian, especially of every minister, to be a life of self sacrifice and self denial throughout, even as was the life of Him who "pleased not himself"?

We have been slothful. We have been sparing of our toil. We have not endured hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. We have not sought to gather up the fragments of our time, that not a moment might be thrown idly or unprofitably away. Precious hours and days have been wasted in sloth, in idle company, in pleasure, in idle or worthless reading, that might have been devoted to the closet, the study, the pulpit or the meeting! Indolence, self indulgence, fickleness, flesh pleasing, have eaten like a canker into our ministry, arresting the blessing and marring our success. We have manifested but little of the unwearied, self denying love with which, as shepherds, we ought to have watched over the flocks committed to our care. We have fed ourselves, and not the flock. We have dealt deceitfully with God, whose servants we profess to be.

We have been cold. Even when diligent, how little warmth and glow! The whole soul is not poured into the duty, and hence it wears too often the repulsive air of 'routine' and 'form'. We do not speak and act like men in earnest. Our words are feeble, even when sound and true; our looks are careless, even when our words are weighty; and our tones betray the apathy which both words and looks disguise. Love is lacking, deep love, love strong as death, love such as made Jeremiah weep in secret places. In preaching and visiting, in counseling and reproofing, what formality, what coldness, how little tenderness and affection!

We have been timid. Fear has often led us to smooth down or generalize truths which if broadly stated must have brought hatred and reproach upon us. We have thus often failed to declare to our people the whole counsel of God. We have shrunk from reproofing, rebuking and exhorting with all patience and doctrine. We have feared to alienate friends, or to awaken the wrath of enemies.

We have been lacking in solemnity. How deeply ought we to be abased at our levity, frivolity, flippancy, vain mirth, foolish talking and jesting, by which grievous injury has been done to souls, the progress of the saints retarded, and the world countenanced in its wretched vanities.

We have preached ourselves, not Christ. We have sought applause, courted honor, been avaricious of fame and jealous of our reputation. We have preached too often so as to exalt ourselves instead of magnifying Christ, so as to draw men's eyes to ourselves instead of fixing them on Him and His cross. Have we not often preached Christ for the very purpose of getting honor to ourselves? Christ, in the sufferings of His first coming and the glory of His second, has not been the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, of all our sermons.

We have not duly studied and honored the Word of God. We have given a greater prominence to man's writings, man's opinions, man's systems in our studies than to the Word. We have drunk more out of human cisterns than divine. We have held more communion with man than God. Hence the mold and fashion of our spirits, our lives, our words, have been derived more from man than God. We must study the Bible more. We must steep our souls in it. We must not only lay it up within us, but transfuse it through the whole texture of the soul. The study of truth in its academic more than in its devotional form has robbed it of its freshness and power, engendering formality and coldness.

We have not been men of prayer. The spirit of prayer has slumbered among us. The closet has been too little frequented and delighted in. We have allowed business, study or active labor to interfere with our closet hours. A feverish atmosphere has found its way into our closet, disturbing the sweet calm of its blessed solitude. Sleep, company, idle visiting, foolish talking and jesting, idle reading, unprofitable occupations, engross time

that might have been redeemed for prayer. Why is there so little concern to get time to pray? Why is there so much speaking, yet so little prayer? Why is there so much running to and fro, yet so little prayer? Why so much bustle and business, yet so little prayer? Why so many meetings with our fellow men, yet so few meetings with God? Why so little being alone, so little thirsting of the soul for the calm, sweet hours of unbroken solitude, when God and His child hold fellowship together as if they could never part? It is the lack of these solitary hours that not only injures our own growth in grace, but makes us such unprofitable members of the church of Christ, and that renders our lives useless. In order to grow in grace, we must be much alone with God. It is not in society, even Christian society that the soul grows most rapidly and vigorously. In one single quiet hour of prayer it will often make more progress than in whole days of company with others. It is in the 'desert' that the dew falls freshest and the air is purest. So with the soul. It is when none but God is near; when His presence alone, like the desert air in which there is mingled no noxious breath of man, surrounds and pervades the soul; it is then that the eye gets the clearest, simplest view of eternal certainties; it is then that the soul gathers in wondrous refreshment and power and energy. Nearness to God, fellowship with God, waiting upon God, resting in God, have been too little the characteristic either of our private or our ministerial walk. Hence our example has been so powerless, our labors so unsuccessful, our sermons so meager, our whole ministry so fruitless and feeble.

We have not honored the Holy Spirit. We have not sought His teaching or His anointing. "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth." (1 John 2:20). Neither in the study of the Word nor the preaching of it to others, have we duly acknowledged His office as the Enlightener of the understanding, the Revealer of the truth, the Testifier and Glorifier of Christ. We have grieved Him by the slight put upon Him as the Teacher, the Convincer, the Comforter, the Sanctifier. Hence He has almost departed from us, and left us to reap the fruit of our own perversity and unbelief. Besides, we have grieved Him by our inconsistent walk, by our lack of circumspection, by our worldly mindedness, by our unholiness, by our prayerlessness, by our unfaithfulness, by our lack of solemnity, by a life and conversation so little in conformity with the character of a disciple or the office of ambassador.

We have had little of the mind of Christ. We have come far short of the example of the Master. We have had little of the grace, the compassion, the meekness, the lowliness, the love of Jesus. His weeping over Jerusalem is a feeling in which we have but little heartfelt sympathy. His seeking of the lost is little imitated by us. His unwearied teaching of the multitudes we shrink from as too much for flesh and blood. His days of fasting, His nights of watchfulness and prayer, are not fully realized as models for us to copy. His counting not His own life dear unto Him that He might glorify the Father and finish the work given Him to do, is but little remembered by us as the principle on which we are to act. Yet surely we are to follow His steps; the servant is to walk where his Master has led the way; the under shepherd is to be what the Chief Shepherd was. We must not seek rest or ease in a world where He whom we love had none.

We have been unbelieving. It is unbelief that makes us so cold in our preaching, so slothful in visiting, and so remiss in all our sacred duties. It is unbelief that chills our life and straitens our heart. It is unbelief that makes us handle eternal realities with such irreverence. It is unbelief that makes us ascend with so light a step into the pulpit to deal with immortal beings about heaven and hell.

We have not been sincere in our preaching. If we were, could we be so cold, so prayerless, so inconsistent, so slothful, so worldly, so unlike men whose business is all about eternity? We must be more in earnest if we would win souls. We must be more in earnest if we would walk in the footsteps of our beloved Lord, or if we would fulfill the vows that are upon us. We must be more in earnest if we would be less than hypocrites. We must be more in earnest if we would finish our course with joy, and obtain the crown at the Master's coming. We must work while it is day; the night comes when no man can work.

We have been unfaithful. The fear of man and the love of his applause have often made us afraid. We have been unfaithful to our own souls, to our flocks, and to our brethren; unfaithful in the pulpit, in visiting, in discipline in the church. In the discharge of every one of the duties of our stewardship there has been grievous unfaithfulness. Instead of the special particularization of the sin reproved, there has been the vague allusion. Instead of the bold reproof, there has been the timid hint. Instead of the uncompromising condemnation, there has been the feeble disapproval. Instead of the unswerving consistency of a holy life whose uniform tenor should be a protest against the world and a rebuke of sin, there has been such an amount of unfaithfulness in our walk and conversation, in our daily deportment and talking with others, that any degree of faithfulness we have been enabled to manifest on the Lord's Day is almost neutralized by the lack of circumspection which our weekday life exhibits.

We need men that will spend and be spent, that will labor and pray, that will watch and weep for souls!