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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

admiration at the sturdy courage the reformers displayed, protesting ever, like the Roman senator in every speech, "Censeo tamen delenda est Carthago."

RICHARD W. HILEY.



ART. IV.—WHAT CONSTITUTES A SUCCESSFUL MINISTRY?

IT is with no affected diffidence that I attempt to answer a question so vitally important and so deeply interesting to every faithful minister of Christ. I can only hope that the shortcomings of my own remarks may be fully supplied by the words of those speakers who may follow me.

What do we in general understand by success? Is it not the attainment of the object towards which our efforts have been directed? A man of business is successful if he realizes large profits, a statesman if his measures command the confidence of his supporters and result in adding to the prosperity of the country. Or, coming down to everyday life, a farmer meets with success if his diligence in cultivating his land, sowing his seeds at the fitting opportunity, and duly tending the advancing growth, result, through a favouring season, in his securing a plentiful harvest and obtaining a remunerative price for his grain. A fisherman meets with success if his efforts in throwing his line or casting his net result in an abundant take of fish.

In all these cases the degree of success depends largely on the fitness of the means used and the diligence with which they are applied; but it also depends in varying degree on causes which lie altogether beyond human control; so that, speaking generally of human affairs, we may say that in order to success (1) the object in view must in itself be an attainable one, and there must be sufficient warrant for believing success to be possible in our own case; (2) the right means must be employed in the right way; (3) external conditions must be favourable.

It is the same in spiritual things, and more particularly in respect of our present subject—the work of the Christian ministry. The object aimed at must be one which we have a reasonable prospect of attaining, (2) the right means must be employed in the right way, (3) external conditions must be favourable. But I may add that whilst in human affairs man often works for self, for the attainment of his own ends and object, the Christian minister has to aim at the object set before him by his Lord and Heavenly Master.

What, then, are (1) the objects in view? And what is our warrant for hoping to attain them?

Fulfilment of the Lord's command to preach His Gospel, baptizing in His name, and teaching men to observe all things whatsoever He had committed to His disciples, the feeding His lambs and His sheep, and (Eph. iv. 11, 12) the edifying of the body of Christ; for the Apostle assures us that the gift of Apostles, prophets, and evangelists, pastors and teachers, was for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Our warrant for expecting success is the Master's own assurance: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world," as well as the Old Testament promise (Isa. lv. 11): "My word that goeth forth out of My mouth shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

But the object in view is not merely the use of means in obedience to the Lord's command, but the attainment of the end for which the Lord would have those means to be used. The object in view must for every faithful minister be the bringing souls into saving union with Christ through the reception of the message of the Gospel; with less than this he cannot, and ought not, to rest satisfied. The Gospel may be faithfully set forth; but if souls refuse to accept it, the ministry cannot, so far as they are concerned, be counted successful.

Nor is it only the bringing souls into saving union with Christ which must be aimed at; there is the work of the pastor and teacher—"the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. iv. 12, 13); or, as elsewhere stated, "the work of warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ."

And this is not all: the real aim should be not merely that souls may be saved from perdition and fitted for the joys of heaven, and so that multitudes of living stones may be added to the spiritual temple, but that God may be glorified thereby. This must be the paramount aim, and if this be absent the highest and chiefest object is lacking; for if every tongue is to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, it is to be to the glory of God the Father (Phil. ii. 11), even as the Lord said of Himself (John viii. 49, 50)—"I honour My Father—I seek not Mine own glory."

What shall be said as to the means and the employment of

them? What are the means which are right in themselves and what is the right employment of them?

As to means, spiritual men are wanted for spiritual work. God can work, if He so please, even by the false professor. Christ may be preached even "of contention," and "not sincerely," and the message may be used to effect conversions; but ordinarily if a man is with success to hold up Christ to the sinner, it must be because he is himself acquainted with Him and in living union with Him. His knowledge of the Saviour must moreover be employed with all diligence. There must be some degree of that sense of responsibility, of the danger of unsaved souls, and of the worth of Christ which led St. Paul by the space of three years to cease not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts xx. 31), and to be able to say to the Ephesian converts that he had kept back nothing that was profitable, but had showed them and taught them publicly and from house to house.

Such a ministry, whatever the results as regards others, must at least succeed in carrying out the Master's will.

But what of external conditions? Here lies the chief knot to be untied. They lie beyond human control. The Gospel may be faithfully preached by word and illustrated by the life, yet it may be rejected, as it was at Athens, "For it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom. ix. 16). "Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase" (1 Cor. iii. 7). "No man can come to Me, said Christ, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto Me" (St. John vi. 44, 45).

In the object which we set before us, in the means we adopt, in the degree of diligence with which we employ them, human responsibility comes in; but there it ceases. Through the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit we may succeed in the delivery of our message and in the prayerful discharge of our ministry; the reception of the message lies wholly beyond our control; and in a large degree the effect of our teaching and watching must do so likewise.

But now, supposing our object to have been right and our efforts rightly directed, we come to a very vital branch of our main question, namely, How is success to be estimated? what are the standards by which it is to be judged? Success may be apparent to the eye of sense, or it may be visible only to the eye of faith. These do not exclude one another, but the one does not necessarily imply the existence of the other. The test must be found in the application of the first principles from which we started.

How far, then, has any given ministry kept in view the primary aim of all—the glory of God—the glory of God first and the bringing of souls into vital union with Christ, and their growth in holiness as promoting the glory of God? Is the building up of a visible society to be the first aim, or is this to be regarded as secondary, useful only so far as it contributes to the higher purpose of winning and training souls for Christ? Is success necessarily involved in a large array of professing Church members, in crowded congregations attracted by ornate services, or in the active promotion of church agencies, in attention to church music and artistic decoration, or even in a large roll of communicants? or, again, is success involved in personal attachment to the minister? All these things are obvious to the eye of sense, and where the most real and abundant success in all respects is found, there some at least of these externals will, without doubt, be present. Yet, on the other hand, many of these externals may be seen as the result of a given ministry, and yet that ministry, if judged by the true standard, may after all lack true success. The vital question is, Has the ministry aimed at leading lost souls to a saving union with the great Head of the Church? Has it been directed to the training and feeding of the lambs and the flock, and this not that the instrument may be admired or beloved, but that God may be glorified thereby?

Then, again, Have the fitting means been used? Has there been a trusting to mere human methods of civilizing and raising human nature from a degraded social and moral condition, or has it been clearly seen and kept in view that spiritual results, results which an Almighty Spirit alone can accomplish, can only be brought about by spiritual means; that, whilst human instrumentality is employed, the only effective agent is the Divine Almighty Power of the Spirit? Have all the efforts made, and all the means employed, been conceived and carried out with this in view?

Has, then, the result of means rightly chosen and rightly used been that a large number of souls have manifestly, through the instrumentality of that ministry, been brought from darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God? Is it evident that the Christian life of believers has been helped forward, that desponding souls have been cheered, that the lambs of the flock have been tended, guarded, and led on to full-grown spiritual life? Has the outcome of these things been that year by year there has been an increasing proportion of living Christians in the congregation? Has a spirit of unreserved consecration to the Master's service, and of brotherly love and concord, been more and more apparent?

Has there been more and more of activity and self-denying effort in the cause of Christ and in the relief of suffering humanity, and this because Christ wills it thus? In such a case there can be no difficulty in saying, Here at least is a successful ministry. The aim has been right, so has the choice and use of means, and the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit have assuredly been vouchsafed. The Lord will indeed have given testimony to the Word of His grace.

But it is not always thus. It may be that the servant has rightly delivered his message; it may be that he has been diligent in the use of means, and yet that the indispensable condition of success—the presence and work of the Holy Spirit—has apparently been withheld. Few or no distinct conversions have resulted from the efforts made; souls seem to be still asleep, and dead in carelessness and sin. Such cases are surely not unknown. Whether it is often thus when the aim has truly been the glory of God before all else, I do not dare to say. God only can read the secrets of the heart; but we do know that He who ever did the will of His Father, and who sought not His own glory but the glory of Him that sent Him found cause to weep over impenitent Israel, and to say, “Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life” (John v. 40). “It is enough then for the disciple that he be as his Master, and for the servant as his Lord” (St. Matt. x. 25). The Master Himself cannot have failed; if rejected by Israel He succeeded in doing the will of His Father. Then must we say, when the invitation has been given in the Master’s name and has been refused, that the servant’s work has met with no success? If he has faithfully given the message and sought diligently to tend the flock, will he not have succeeded in doing his Master’s will?

There may be little success discernible to the eye of sense, but to the eye of faith the result in working out the eternal purposes of God is seen to be a certainty, though that result may not be made apparent until after many days. Meanwhile, the servant’s reward must lie in his Master’s approving smile. If the servant can but in some degree and with truth say, with St. Paul, “We have the testimony of our conscience that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God we have had our conversation in the world” he will not have laboured in vain, he will at least have done the will of his heavenly Lord.

The proud rebellious heart may sometimes be ready to say, Why should I have been sent to a portion of the field where the Master knew beforehand that the invitation would be rejected, and from whence few if any souls could be

gathered out ? It may be, and perhaps too often is the case, that the answer to such a question, should it arise, is that the all-wise and all-loving Head of the Church saw that the servant could not with safety to himself be entrusted with manifest and visible results of his labours, and that thus out of very love a more humbling position has been assigned him. Or, again, it may be the Lord's will that even on so thankless a soil the seed shall yet be scattered, in order that the hearts which reject it may be left without excuse. It is a sorrow and grief to think that it should be so ; but the humble and obedient servant will be willing to do his Master's behest, and will bear in mind that after all it is not he who is rejected, but He that sent him. And must not the Master's pain at rejection be infinitely greater than the servant's ?

Then, again, it may be, and sometimes is, the case that whilst the aim has been right, and the work right, the result is not immediate, although eventually, to become visible. The seed may slumber in the ground, and after many years spring up and bear fruit, even when the sower has passed to his rest. Can we say that he has had no success ? From time to time it does seem as if when a minister has brought the Gospel to a place or congregation which had previously been a stranger to it, and a large harvest of souls has been vouchsafed to him, the abundant crop seems to have exhausted the soil, and a series of years with their attendant changes have to pass over the place before any marked ingathering is again to be witnessed. And it may be that in the great scheme of Redemption—it may be the will of God that this or that servant shall be used more often as a savour of death unto them that perish than a savour of life unto them that believe. Then, moreover, the winning souls to Christ is not the only work of the ministry, there is the tending and feeding of the sheep and lambs who are already in the fold ; that work is dear to Christ, and although it may seem less striking in the eyes of man than the work of gathering souls, it is the Master's work. He prayed not for the world, but for those whom the Father had given Him out of the world, that they might be kept from evil ; and the servant who, taught by the Spirit and mighty in the Scriptures, is used to feed the flock cannot be said to be wholly destitute of success.

And yet more, although there may be no evident ingathering of souls, although there may be no very conspicuous change for good in the sphere of our ministry as a manifest result of our efforts, there may yet be a silent and effectual opposition to the current of evil which would otherwise reach to far greater proportions, and there may be a bettering of the moral

and social condition of our parish, good so far as it goes, although so grievously short of the change we have so longed to see.

We must also remember, in estimating the result of our efforts, that the work—the successful work of each and every minister—is not the same. One soweth, another reapeth. The Master has need, it may be, of different tools and different workmen; the reaping may not come until the sower has long slept in his grave, yet the sower has nevertheless been successful. As yet the eye of faith only can see it. Faith's warrant is the word—"Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world"—and the assurance, "My word shall accomplish that whereto I sent it." Happy is he who has learned that "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam. iii. 26), and that "every man's work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it" (1 Cor. iii. 13).

Success, then, may lie both in having faithfully done the Master's will, and also in present visible results manifest even to the eye of sense; or it may lie as yet only in having aimed at the Master's honour and glory, and in doing His will in His way. As yet results may be visible only to the eye of faith, but the faithful servant will have been successful, although it may not be in the way he would himself have chosen.

Whilst, however, we bear in mind that results are beyond all human control, whilst the eye of faith may and must look beyond what is present and evident, the lack of manifest blessing on our work ought ever to lead to deep searchings of heart before God. Is there anything in us which leads to the great cause of barrenness, namely, the withholding of the Holy Spirit's influence? Is our aim the right one? Are we working with constant believing dependence on the promises, content if only we may do the will of our Father and of Him who gave Himself for us? If it be indeed thus with us, we have the chief constituents of a successful ministry. To know the real results we must wait for the day when the secrets of all hearts shall be made manifest—when each one shall have his fitting praise of God.

W. H. PURCHAS.

