

MINISTER OF CHRIST FOR THE TIMES

"Be ye not afraid, but speak."—Acts xviii, 9

The minister for the times is a fearless man. He is not dismayed at the faces of men. He girds himself to go where God calls, and to speak what God commands. Infinite grace has made him a defenced city—an iron pillar and brazen walls, against all that do wickedly. He is not afraid of evil men, nor of their words, nor dismayed at their looks, though briars and thorns be with him, and though he dwell among scorpions. He fears not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. If Peter and John are forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus, they hearken to God rather than to men; while, with all boldness, they speak his word. Paul speaks boldly, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God; and if chains are clanking, and fires are burning, he is ready not to be bound only, but also to suffer death for the name of the Lord Jesus. His glory is, that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether it were by life or by death. The faithful and fearless minister of the gospel runs not uncalled into danger. He exposes not himself without necessity to the insults or displeasure of the enemies of God. But these insults—this displeasure—frighten him never from the line of usefulness and duty. He has died to the world. He has resigned his reputation to Christ, and submitted to be a fool for his sake. He is moved by lofty contemplations and views, and knows himself to be enlisted in the ranks of righteousness and truth. He knows that God is infinitely good and gracious; while man is vile, and his face straight towards death and ruin. He knows there is a great salvation, by which the race might be actually redeemed and blessed forever. He knows that all the affairs of earth are nothing in comparison with this. He knows that all men, without exception of age, rank, station, or capacity, should at once lay hold of life; and that to bring all up to the heavenly glory, is, under God, the great work of the Church on earth.

Fear, under such circumstances, is utterly misplaced. The true minister is a soldier. He buckles on the harness, and braces up his heart, and puts on strength, and wars a good warfare. He opens his mouth wherever it is proper, and speaks boldly, as he ought to speak, the great things of God and salvation. He keeps back nothing that is profitable, but declares the whole counsel of God, regarding not the smiles or the frowns of men, but "looking unto Jesus," and to the sublime work he came to earth to accomplish.

PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH

Rev. Joseph H. Smith

The boasted progress of the church in our times is more that of a worldly sort than in things which are essentially Christian. That is to say, it is numerical, social, educational and monetary: together with advances in architectural construction, and in arts of music, liturgy and ecclesiasticism with a trend towards prelacy, perhaps. It copies closely after "big business" methods in its financial policies; somewhat, too, in lines of political partisanship, and pleasure propaganda, and with a literature of poetry, fiction and romance more than Theology, Spiritual Life, or Hymnology.

Since we see similar progress of institutions that are not Christian, even in some instances as

to humanitarianism that is beneficent, though not at all in the name of Christ, it follows that one must be discriminative to distinguish between the progress of the church and the progress of Christianity. Now, that the church (whether wisely or lawfully we mean not here to discuss) has shared the benefits of the world's progress in utilities, discoveries, equipments and facilities for its work is evident. There is a certain up-to-date-ness in church life of America; but this fact of itself does not evidence anything for Christianity. Certainly not so when the playhouses are drawing greater numbers than the churches: Secret societies are increasing their membership at a greater percentage, and developing loyalty to a better degree; and colleges are advancing more in their lines of thought life and art than the churches.

The scholarly, cultured and spiritually-minded Bishop Henry N. Warren once said in our hearing at a great century anniversary occasion of one of the largest Protestant denominations: "We surely have made much advance in many ways as a church during the past century: but, beloved, we need to climb backwards an hundred years to get where our fathers were, spiritually."

Now it is a notable fact that, as at Laodicea, a church may have gotten rich, and increased in goods (of various sorts) and yet be poor and blind and naked in that which is essential to Christianity: and at the same time not only ignorant of that fact but be boasting of its progress and its greatness. It is an indisputable fact that the history of churches in general is a record of inward decline as to the things of the Spirit, and of outward drift towards the world. There is not a considerable church or denomination among us, but what probably showed a better type of Christianity at the beginning of its history than it has before the world at the present time. Conferences, Assemblies, and Presbyteries are ever and again facing the fact of lowered standards and seared consciences among their people, in domestic, social and commercial life: and are grappling the problems of relaxing their rules to suit the people, rather than raising their people to meet the rules.

There have been no outstanding and verified developments of doctrine in the past half century. That most valued product of advancing scholarship, the revised translation of the Scriptures, has neither added nor subtracted a single jot or title of the faith of the fathers, nor made any such appear more clearly. The thought acumen of our scholars and educators has added nothing to the better understanding of the deeper meaning of the Scriptures; and the schooling of our ministry has given us no better shepherding of the spiritual life of believers; no better feeding of lambs or of sheep.

The worship of our universities, like that at Mars Hill, is trending more and more towards that of "the unknown God." The mania "for some new thing" has well-nigh turned the head and heart of the people altogether away from "asking for the old paths." Whereas, as John Wesley (quoting perhaps from some one two hundred years before him) said: "Anything essentially new in religion is essentially false."

Some long established churches are threatened with a relapse altogether in missionary zeal, and are listening to suggestions of meeting heathendom with a flag of truce, instead of a call for surrender at the feet of Jesus. The name Christian, we are told, was erased from the sign of the Young Men's Association in Seoul, Korea; and that not by the heathen, but by the church people. It is being left now to a comparative small band to push evangelism in the homeland as well as abroad: whereas this is the major com-

mission of Christ to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The shadow of worldly bigness, and the glare and gleam of worldly brightness has blinded the eyes of the people, and the roar of men's applause has deafened the ears and silenced the voice of preachers concerning the great Judgment Day, and church people are as little warned to flee the wrath to come as were the Pharisees and the Sadducees in the time of John the Baptist. Nicodemus, master in Israel, was no more ignorant of the New Birth, than are multitudes of men, high and low, in churches esteemed most progressive of our day.

Their grandmothers of a generation or two ago, enjoyed more of the presence and love of Christ around the hearthstones of log cabin homes than do their children's children with the Young People's societies development, and their high school and college advantages today. Objective life has overshadowed the subjective; and, where they think at all on serious matters, the solidarity of humanity has absorbed the attention due to the soul of man.

Our progress has not been to valor; and here the church finds herself confronted by one of the fiercest and most subtle attacks, and strongest intrenchments of the anti-Christ, with but few of her sons free enough from worldly cares, or far enough from world snares, to be available or eligible for the military service of the Kingdom. "Ask for the old paths, where is the good way."—Jeremiah 6:16.—The Sky Pilot.

WE NEED GOD

If we do not have the Spirit of God, it were better to shut the churches, to nail up the doors, to put a black cross on them and say, "God, have mercy on us."

If you ministers have not the Spirit of God, you had better not preach and your people had better stay at home.

I think I speak not too strongly when I say that a church in the land without the Spirit of God is rather a curse than a blessing. If you have not the Spirit of God, Christian worker, remember that you stand in somebody else's way; you are as a tree bearing no fruit standing where a fruitful tree might grow.—Charles H. Spurgeon.

THE EFFECTUAL FERVENT PRAYER

Dr. Wilbur Chapman wrote to a friend, "I have learned some great lessons concerning prayer. At one of our missions in England the audience was exceedingly small; but I received a note saying that an American missionary * * * was going to pray God's blessing down upon our work. He was known as Praying Hyde. Almost instantly the tide turned. The hall became packed, and at my first invitation fifty men accepted Christ as their Saviour. As we were leaving I said, 'Mr. Hyde, I want you to pray for me.' He came to my room, turned the key in the door, and dropped on his knees, and waited five minutes without a single syllable coming from his lips. I could hear my own heart thumping, and his beating. I felt the hot tears running down my face. I knew I was with God. Then, with upturned face, down which the tears were streaming, he said, 'O God!' Then for five minutes at least he was still again; and then, when he knew that he was talking with God * * * there came up from the depths of his heart such petitions for men as I had never heard before. I rose from my knees to know what real prayer was. We believe that prayer is mighty and we believe it as we never did before."—Publisher Unknown.