

THIS MINISTRY

Therefore, since it by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but, by the open statement of the truth, we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. It is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God. 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 5-7 NRSV.

There is nothing in the New Testament that would suggest a mechanical entering into what is called the Lord's work. It is the spontaneous expression of your own inner history with God.

Personality, in the higher personal sense, is character formed in secret with God. It is the expression among people of what has taken place apart from people, where people have not seen and do not know; where they are unable to trace what is happening. It is the deep, inner, secret history, where God alone knows what is happening. God has him or her into a realm beyond his or her own depths and certainly where no one else understands him or her. It is there that spiritual personality is being formed.

Then, eventually, out of those deep dealings of God with him or her in the hidden place, he or she comes out with a message. It is not something he or she has arranged and prepared and put down on paper. It is the expression of something that God has done in him or her, not only shown **to** him or her but done **in** him or her, for the showing follows the doing. God shows the meaning of what he has done, and that makes the message.

Presently, when you have gone through, God begins to interpret what he has been doing, and you come out with a testimony. The Lord Jesus himself had this experience. When he came out and publicly stood before heaven and people and hell, two things happened. On the one hand, the Father said, "You are my beloved Son." On the other hand, "This is my beloved Son," calling attention of people to him as approved by God. These two things were the result of thirty years of secret history with God. He simply had to live in secret with God.

This is a basic principle of ministry. It is a tragic thing to take a young man or a young woman and give them a short time in a Bible school and push them out into the full responsibility of God's work. They have not got the deep history wrought out in secret with God that makes them able to meet the full force of Satanic opposition. They will either have to go to pieces or compromise and come down to a lower level.

Something happens to make us able ministers of the New Covenant. It is not collegiate preparation; it is not training in the schools; it is a secret history with God. And so, this ministry is not the professional ministry according to the system of our day. This

ministry comes out of a secret history with God, and it cannot be effective beyond the measure of what has been wrought in the secret place with God. Do not break away from God to get into your ministry.

The second feature of this ministry is “through the will of God,” that is, “by God’s mercy.” Paul is here establishing at once the authority of his ministry. It is “through the will of God.” Only ministry that has this behind it has the authority of God upon it.

This ministry must have the authority of God in it, and the authority of God is the attestation from heaven, which comes in your own heart when God has seen in you the development in secret of what he was seeking to realize. You will never get the divine ordination until you have been “approved unto God.” It must be when his hands are laid on through an open heaven. So we cannot be too strong in our emphasis upon the necessity and the importance of a secret life with God behind all ministry.

“He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” The gift will suffer and become purely professional unless the secret history is maintained in full strength. One of the perils of Christian activity is that you get so busy that you neglect the secret history. You lose the background, and presently you begin to discover that you do not have that which meets the demand. You are losing grip and power and are on the highway to a breakdown. It is the loss of the secret place and the secret history with God. One of the things that any servant of God has to do is to refuse that measure of activity that goes beyond the possibility of keeping an adequate secret history with God. We have to settle this, difficult as it is. We must go to the Lord in secret. We must never be called out because it is an opportunity for doing good. The enemy would keep us tremendously busy. This ministry is founded on a deep life with God in secret.

God must be able to keep us constantly checked up in secret. We must go back to God and have those quiet times, where the Lord can constantly say to us, “You remember so and so. That was not right. You will have to correct that.” Perhaps we have said something wrong or failed to say something we should have said. God never passes it over. If we gave God the quiet time, he would bring up those things, and we would be reminded of them. But if we ride on over those things, in the end the Lord will leave us to plunge on. It is what a person is before God and not what he or she is before people.

What is this ministry? It is the only ministry that God approves. Preaching the gospel is not the first thing in this ministry. “For it is God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Here is the law of life in Christ. The God, whose glory was on the face of Moses, then under a veil (Exodus 34), has shined without a veil into our hearts. There is no veil over the face of Jesus Christ, and the unveiled face of Jesus Christ is revealed in our hearts by the holy Spirit. God has shone in our hearts. What for? For the same purpose as with Moses- to make known the mind of God to others.

How do others come to know the mind of God? By the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ being manifested out from our inner lives. From that, others are able to see the Lord, that we have an inner radiant knowledge of God – “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” God has shone in and made us, not merely in what we say, but in what we are, an expression of Christ as the revelation of God. That is the ministry. This is what we must have – a secret history with God. If all of our ministry were like that, how much more would be accomplished for God.

“We have this treasure (this unveiling of the Lord Jesus in our hearts) in clay jars.” He keeps us from taking any of the glory to ourselves, from being anything people would take account of, “so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God.”

What a reflection of the revelation of Jesus Christ - the excellent greatness of the power of God revealed in our hearts! Do you pray for power in your ministry? Get the excellent greatness of the power of Jesus Christ in your heart; you cannot get a greater power

It is the revelation of Jesus Christ that is going to scatter the enemy. The exceeding greatness of the power of this ministry is that we may have the inchoing of God revealing his glory in the face of Jesus Christ in our hearts. It may not be a public ministry. It is the Lord’s ministry we are in, and there is to be an expression of the power of God in every bit of it.

The ministry is the showing forth of Jesus Christ. “It pleased God to reveal his Son in me, that I might proclaim him among the nations.” It was the inchoing of Jesus Christ that made Paul a missionary. It is setting forth Christ. That is this ministry, and we should make it our prayer that what we know of the ministry for us will be a shining forth of Jesus Christ.

It is the glory of the Father, and nothing can stand before it. In order that it might be so, the vessel should be such that it will not take any glory away from him. He will keep it weak so that everything will be to his glory. We must recognize the nature of the ministry before which principalities and powers cannot stand. It is not what we say. It is the measure on which the Lord Jesus Christ is mediated as the glory of God that counts.

The ministry is the ministry of Christ. It is constituted solely upon the basis of what Christ is within us. That is the examination for the ministry. This is the certificate of the ministry. The real credential of the ministry is what the Lord Jesus is in our hearts. Seeing that it is Christ within that constitutes the ministry, that it is the ministration of Jesus Christ, we are able to take this extra step and see that Christ revealed within represents a position to which we have come. It represents that we have come to a large place. It means that we have come out of the wilderness. It means that we have come over Jordan. It is there that you come to have your full ministry. This particular ministry of which we are speaking is founded upon, first of all, that you are right over Jordan and Christ in his fullness is your possession – “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” You have

come to the place where Christ is all. The ministry according to God has power, like Joshua, to drive out the enemy, and the have to flee. Ministry like that, that scatters the enemy, is based entirely upon the measure in which Christ is inwardly full in us. The ministry of Jesus Christ is nothing more or less than the revelation of Jesus Christ in the heart of a child of God, and you are going to minister more or less effectively according to the measure of what God is in you inwardly. God cannot go beyond that.

All other ministry we talk about does not come within the divine thought. It makes the ministry a very simple thing, but a very searching thing. It is not qualification as speakers. It is not any scholastic equipment. It is not that we are able to speak or to write. It is not that we have academic gifts or equipment, but it is just what the Lord Jesus is in us, being shown through us.

“Jesus I know.” That is the ministry, where the forces of evil are forced to take account of the presence of Christ before you speak, where others around you are conscious that there is something here that makes it difficult for them to sin without knowing that they are sinning. Some may sin and not know they are sinning until Christ comes on the scene in one of his servants, and then they are smitten. It is the presence of Christ. God has “shone in our hearts.”

We may preach all the sermons that ever people could preach, and it will accomplish nothing if Christ is not the registration of our presence. It is Christ-consciousness, produced through the man and the woman in whom he reigns. It is the measure of our inheritance. “We have this treasure in clay jars.” The measure of Christ is the measure of the ministry, not the measure of the vessel. Although it costs, we are prepared to be broken if only Christ is commensurately revealed.

Of course, when we get into ministry like that, we expect certain things. We get the full impact of the devil. “We are pressed in on every side.” The ministry of Christ brings you immediately into direct contact with the forces of the devil, but in those conditions, the ministry is vindicated because, under pressure, persecution, and trial, you are not destroyed. You are not left behind.

That is the ministry – that the Lord Jesus, who has conquered death, in a vessel is simply proving hell impotent. That is where the Lord has his full place. We have this ministry, and as we have received this ministry, we faint not. What the Lord wants to do is to make a large place for Christ in us.

--Excerpted and edited by Patrick J. Hession from a message by T. Austin-Sparks.