The Commission Opened

William Wales Horne | Added: Apr 07, 2025 | Category: Theology

An introductory address delivered at the dissenting meeting-house, at Plymouth Dock, November 1808, by William Wales Horne, 1773-1826 following an invitation to preach there for several weeks.

The ministers of Christ are not only well informed by the letter of scripture, and made skilful in word and doctrine, to be able to defend, argumentatively, the truth as it is in Jesus; but, it is their peculiar province, as well as their greatest happiness, to speak those things which they have seen and heard, and to declare, upon an experimental ground, the saving power, eternal love, and superlative preciousness, of that glorious Immanuel, who is formed in their hearts, the hope of glory. They preach that gospel which they received, not of man, but from the Lord; and possess that knowledge of divine things which flesh and blood never revealed to them, but their Father who is in heaven!

They run in the ways of God under a divine command, and preach by the majestic authority, and dignified commission of heaven!

‘There are those’, saith the Lord, ‘who run, but I never sent them.’ Such ministers, shall not profit the people of God: neither can they give any satisfactory account, to a spiritual people, of their call to the ministry, nor of their being, in reality, divinely called, by grace, to know the Lord. Being thus dead in trespasses and sins, it is morally, and absolutely impossible, that they should be of any service to the church of God.

But a minister of Christ, with a sweet sense of his own personal salvation—with the rich experience of pardon, justification, election, and adoption, in Christ, goes forth in the strength of the Lord, with this divinely sweet, and extensive commission, ‘Go ye into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’ This being my high authority, and extensive commission, I was encouraged to visit you, and certainly cannot be guilty of any crime in coming to Plymouth Dock.

The bounds of God’s ministers are fixed, their work appointed, and direction and strength given them, at all times, for the execution of that work which God is determined to effect, by their instrumentality. I am come therefore, under the encouraging persuasion, that I shall be of some utility to the people of God in this place.

I am come under the high authority, and (I am persuaded) the great and

peculiar blessing of heaven! I am come,

1. Sensible of my weakness, and looking to Jesus for strength: for we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything, as of ourselves; our sufficiency is of God.

2. With a desire to be truly faithful: not consulting your sentiments, nor enquiring what doctrines will please, or what will offend you; but consulting the Word of God, and a good conscience, I am determined to know nothing among you but Christ Jesus, and Him crucified!

3. With an hope to be useful: relying upon His promise to be with me at all times, in all places, and to crown His gospel with success, to His own eternal glory.

4. I am come with a resolution, to call no man master, upon earth, but to consult my all wise Counsellor, and divinely majestic and gracious Master, who is in heaven, and in whose service I take a peculiar pleasure.

5. I am come in the name of no man, sect, nor party whatever, but in the name of the Lord Jesus: and, O that His infinitely precious name may be poured forth like ointment, and then I am well assured you can but love Him.

6. I am come, not to preach my self, but Christ Jesus my Lord, in whose cause and interest I am your willing, humble, and obedient servant, and in that character,

I shall now proceed to enter into the enquiry: ‘I ask, therefore, for what intent ye have sent for me?’ I ask—

1. Because your sending for me gives me that authority; for I have an indubitable right to know, on what account you have engaged me, and in what cause you are desirous of my service.

2. I ask on account of the importance of my commission, and with an animating hope that your motive in sending for me, and mine, in coming, are one;—the salvation of perishing sinners! their deliverance from ignorance—from sin, Satan, the world, and every error, which is often effected by the instrumentality of the ministers of Christ.

For what intent? Was your intention good or bad? were you influenced by right motives, with a desire to accomplish, through the divine blessing, some grand end and design, to the honour and glory of Christ? The motives and intention of some people, in sending for a minister, are highly censurable, and ought to be publicly exposed: some, enveloped in extremist ignorance, when in dying circumstances, send for a minister, as if it was in his power to save them at that sad hour; whereas, when in health, they were totally negligent of the gospel, averse to the truth, and careless of salvation!

I am not censuring the conduct of a minister, in visiting the sick, but the motive of those who send for ministers with such a vain hope, and idolatrous dependence upon a priest!

But to enquire further, and more particularly into your intention, in sending for me; permit me to ask, Was it to preach the works of the law, to build you up in self-righteousness, to bind on the necks of Christ's disciples heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, to mingle the law and the gospel, the old covenant and the new, works and grace, flesh and spirit, after the modern fashion, and in such a way as to corrupt the Word of God, and, indirectly, to sap the very foundation of eternal truth: by opposing, and artfully undermining, and that in the garb of friendship, all the precious, and fundamental doctrines of salvation by grace?

But these, Sirs, I hope, were not your motives—it is not for such intent that you have sent for me. If so, you are egregiously mistaken, and will, I hope, in every sermon I preach to you, and in every sentence I utter, not only meet with disappointment, but with a scriptural refutation, evangelical reprehension, and such spiritual instruction, as shall, under the divine blessing, convince you of your errors and religious delusion: then will you renounce self-righteousness, with unspeakable abhorrence, and embrace the precious Jesus with unutterable affection and delight!

But, persuaded better things of you—that some of you, at least, know and love the gospel, in its unadulterated purity,—I pursue my enquiry with pleasure, because, in that case, you can answer it unequivocally, positively, and to the satisfaction of every minister sent of God.

I, therefore, demand of you who are spiritual, to tell me for what intent you have sent for me; well assured that you can answer, to the glory of God. Or, by your permission, I will take the liberty of answering for you: and,

1. The people of God send for a minister (with a persuasion that he is made so by the eternal Spirit) knowing, that preaching the gospel is an ordinance of God, and has the promise of being attended with His peculiar blessings: and, therefore, are desirous to hear for your instruction and edification.

2. Because they love the sound of the gospel—its doctrines are delightful, being applicable to their case; and they have known, and felt, their holy and salutary influence: consequently, can testify, that they are doctrines according to godliness.

How sweet is the freeness of God's love to a poor sensibly unworthy sinner! How delightful the glad news of electing grace, to a sinner who knows it is not his choosing God, and his ways, that obtains salvation, and will bring him to glory, but the Lord's choosing him before the foundation of the world; and that it was electing Love which looked upon him, when he had neither will nor power to choose the Lord, and, that so powerfully attracted his heart to Christ! To a filthy sinner, how reviving is the sound of

cleansing by the blood of Christ, and to a poor sinner so richly taught of God, as to know that he has neither will nor power, by nature, to embrace Christ, how delightful are the glad tidings of the eternal Spirit's condescending Love, in working in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure! To tell such a soul to come to Christ, and to get Christ, when he feels so dark and wretched, is but to distress him, and add affliction to his bonds! But to tell him that it is the office of the Holy Ghost to reveal Christ with power, is to comfort his soul, at the same time that it ascribes all the glory to the blessed and gracious Comforter. These, Sirs, are the doctrines, which believers love and delight in; and, consequently, wish to hear publicly proclaimed, and scripturally defended.

These are the doctrines which I am divinely commissioned to preach; not only because they are scriptural; but, as the Lord has graciously, and powerfully sealed them upon my own heart and conscience, and given me to enjoy their inexpressible sweetness, I can confidently testify their celestial origin and authenticity, from what I have seen, and heard, felt, and experienced—doctrines, familiarized, and endeared to my soul, by the blessed Comforter; which I have preached successfully for many years, to the disgust, and confusion of Pharisees; to the spiritual conversion of many sinners, and to the unspeakable joy, and consolation, of real believers in Jesus; and, which, in the strength of Christ, I am determined to preach, and defend, during the few weeks that I continue among you: and, therefore, you know, Sirs, by this time, what you have to expect from me.

3. A spiritual people send for a minister, with hearts earnestly and fervently influenced with prayer, and desires, that God may own, and abundantly bless his labours among them, to the joy and rejoicing of their hearts; in detection of error, and the promotion of truth: in pulling down the strongholds of sin and Satan, Arminian legality, and pride; that free, unmerited, eternal, and invincible grace may be known, felt, enjoyed, and glorified in the effectual calling, and deliverance of sinners, from the yoke of bondage—'that deliverance may be preached to the captive, and the opening of the prison doors to them that are bound'.

And, my dear Sirs, permit me to say, that if you were actuated by such a Spirit of prayer, and with such spiritual desires, to answer this grand design, in sending for me, you certainly must wish me, regardless of the frowns of Pharisees, 'Rightly to divide the word of truth;' in order to which, I must distinguish between truth and error, law and gospel, believers and unbelievers, flesh and spirit, or the religion which is born of the flesh, and that which descends from God, and is the work of His Spirit. For where such distinctions are not made, the gospel is not preached in its purity; but, on the contrary, by mingling law and gospel, works and grace; and by preaching works and duties of the creature, instead of the faith of God's elect, and the operations of His Spirit, sinners, who know the plague of their own hearts, are kept in bondage, Pharisees are encouraged in their self-righteous pride, the grace of God trampled underfoot, and my everlastingly precious Jesus stripped of His glories, and robbed of His eternal honour, as

the complete Saviour; in whom a believer possesses everything, and to whom he desires, upon all occasions, and for ever, to ascribe all praise!

For ability to preach the gospel, defend His truth, and comfort His people, I am entirely dependent on the God of all grace: and as my heart is up to Him, and my expectations from Him, it is my prayer for you, that, under His gracious blessing, you may receive, and enjoy the truth, in the love of it, and nobly take up spiritual weapons in its defence: for if any man will live godly in Christ, he shall suffer persecution, and must take up his cross, in order to follow Him.

You are all strangers to me—I know nothing of you: and, consequently, for aught I know, you may be all believers: but I do not expect, and cannot believe, that to be the case; for, I am persuaded, there never was such a congregation existing in the world—yet, may I not hope that many of you know the love of the gospel?—To such of you, I believe my ministry will be ‘a savour of life unto life’, and, oh that the Lord may make me the happy instrument, if it is His will, in bringing many more to a knowledge of themselves, in order that they may feel, and acknowledge their need of Christ! But leaving that with my gracious Lord, I have only to add, That as the Lord has made my soul both happy and free in Christ, I am a free man everywhere; and, consequently, free, and bold to declare the whole counsel of God. ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth.’ May it effectually prove so to you, if acceptable in the sight of God, and to Him shall be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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