

Brother Indeed (The Life of Robert Cleaver Chapman) by Frank Holmes, John Ritchie, Ltd., Kilmarnock, Scotland, (1988). (48 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols.)

1. Christians as Brothers.

My view of Chapman is that he demonstrated, in very practical ways, the meaning of the word “brother.” Are not the church and the world in need of such “brethren”? – Frank Holmes [page v]

2. Worked Hard at Studying the Law.

But, distasteful as this new occupation was, Robert determined to make the best use of the opportunities it offered him. He settled down to hard work, intent on rising as high as he could in the Law. [page 13]

3. Got Baptized Right Away.

James Harrington Evans was soon impressed by the zeal of this new convert. In a very short time Chapman came to him and asked for baptism. “You will wait awhile, and consider the matter,” said the cautious pastor. “No, I will make haste, and delay not, to keep His commandments!” exclaimed the young man. This reply so impressed Evans that he arranged for the baptism forthwith. [page 17]

4. Under the Ministry of James Harrington Evans.

Each Lord’s Day Chapman attended the services. The chapel at John Street was not a Brethren assembly. At that time there was nothing answering to this description in the country. But Evans held views on Christian unity which have a striking similarity to the teachings of the early Brethren. Only scant attention appears to have been paid by students of Chapman’s life to the influence upon him of this godly man, yet that influence was undoubtedly very great. Converted when a curate whilst he was reading one of Cooper’s sermons to his congregation, Evans became such a soul-winner that he was given notice to terminate his curacy. After a time of struggle he seceded from the Church of England and later began his work in John Street. [page 18]

5. Unity in the Church Accepted a Christ-like Life.

Before long the young convert realized that not all who were in fellowship had been baptized by immersion. Evan, though strong on believer’s baptism, was equally strong on the unscripturalness of demanding anything beyond a living faith in Christ from a convert before accepting him into fellowship. He held that all that was required for unity was a common life. If a man had been born into God’s family he felt he had no right to exclude him from fellowship merely because he could not see the need for believer’s baptism. [pages 18-19]

6. Cared Deeply for the Poor.

This burning desire for the spiritual and material welfare of the poor never left him for the rest of his life. He always regarded it as a mark of the true work of Christ that “the poor have the gospel preached to them.” [page 20]

7. His Aim to Live Christ.

But now God’s plan began to unfold. Chapman received an invitation from the members of Ebenezer Strict Baptist Chapel, Barnstaple, to be their pastor. Believing that this was of the Lord, he left London to reside in Barnstaple. Many who knew him in London were critical. They forecast failure. They repeated that he was a poor preacher. His reply was: “there are many who preach Christ, but no so many who live Christ; my great aim will be to *live* Christ.” [page 23-24]

8. Separation and Holiness – Essentials of Christian Life.

Separation from the world and practical holiness of living were constantly stressed by Chapman as being essentials to the Christian life. He gave due prominence to doctrine, but he kept coming back to the need for good works to accompany faith. He commonly exhorted his hearers to become “doers of the word and not hearers only.” [page 29]

9. Free to Teach All in Scripture.

When I was invited to leave London and go to minister the Word of God in Ebenezer Chapel, then occupied by a community of Strict Baptists. I consented to do so, naming one condition only—that I should be free to teach all I found written in Scriptures.”

This one condition, however, left the door open for the sweeping changes which followed. He found written in the Scriptures the command: “Receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” This text, to mention no other, undermined the Strict Baptist position completely, since they will only receive those who have been baptized by immersion on a profession of faith, and reject from the Lord’s Table and from all fellowship, any who do not fulfil this condition, even though they have ample proof that Christ has accepted such as His people. [pages 31-32]

10. Liberty to All Taking Communion and Giving of Gifts.

Baptism was the most delicate subject he had to deal with. In other things his fellow-believers searched the Scriptures with him, and for the most part accorded with his judgment. They looked into the matter of ministry and discovered that one-man ministry was not to be found in the New Testament. Ministry, they found, was a matter of Divine gift, and so they waited upon the Lord to raise up from amongst them pastors, teachers and evangelists. They broke bread in simplicity, and this service developed in time along lines familiar in many Brethren assemblies. Before the actual distribution of

the bread and wine there was a devotional period during which various brethren would lead in thanksgiving, or announce a hymn, or comment briefly upon some Scripture. After all had partaken, a definite word of instruction would be given by Mr. Chapman, or by some other recognized teacher who might be present and led of the Spirit to feed the flock.

This manner of breaking bread was, however, one that developed with time. Chapman never claimed that its precise outline was laid down in Scripture. But its two main principles were Scriptural, namely, the liberty of all brethren to take part as the Spirit led, and the recognition of specific gifts in certain brethren. These principles were shaping the views and practices of several students of the Word of God at that time, especially in Plymouth and Bristol. [page 32]

11. Living by Faith Providing a Guest Home.

Chapman lived at No. 6, and he determined from the start to make his house a place where any of God's people could freely come and stay. He lived by faith, receiving no stipend, and he felt that if people would come and live for a week or two in a household where the smallest item was received at God's Hand by faith, it would help them in their own lives. [page 37]

12. Guests Stayed as Long as Wanted.

It was always a point with Chapman that no questions were asked as to how long visitors intended to stay. When a guest arrived he would be shown to his bedroom, told what were the habits of the household, and requested to leave his boots outside his door for Mr. Chapman to clean. People sometimes suggested to Mr. Chapman that it must be awkward to have visitors arriving at all times, and staying as long as they pleased, especially when his house was so small. "But God arranges that!" he would reply. And if anyone were skeptical, the facts were open for investigation and they showed unmistakably that God *did* arrange it. In nearly seventy years there never was a single occasion when visitors had to be turned away because there was no room. [page 38]

13. Prayed for Daily Provisions.

Sometimes at the end of the day, provisions would run out and there would be no money to buy more. Chapman did not regard this as an emergency. It was simply the way God was working that day. "We must pray about it," he would say. And so next morning's breakfast would be solely provided through prayer. So naturally and unostentatiously was the life of faith lived that those who stayed at No. 6 were quite unaware of anything out of the ordinary. Mr. Chapman did not wish to convey the impression that childlike dependence upon God was an extraordinary thing. [pages 38-39]

14. Chapman Was a Servant above All.

No task was too lowly for Chapman. Visitors were particularly impressed by his habit of cleaning the boots and shoes of his guests. [page 39]

15. A Hot and Cold Bath Daily.

It will be gathered from this that he rarely rose later than 3:30 a.m. By his bedside was a large, square, lead-lined bath. Each night, punctually at 9 o'clock, he said "Goodnight," had a hot bath, and went to bed. Each morning, while the town was still asleep, he jumped into a cold bath, and then dressed. He once said to a young visitor: "You see, dear brother, God has given us a valuable body, and He expects us, as good workmen, to keep it in good order. I open pores of my body at night, and close them with a cold bath in the morning." [page 40]

16. Prayer, Bible Reading, and Meditation till Noon.

Up till midday, whether he was indoors or out, the greater part of his time was given up to prayer, Bible reading and mediation. A conservative estimate would be seven hours of definite communion with God before noon. This was undoubtedly the secret of his spiritual power. [page 40]

17. Saturdays Spent in His Workshop.

On Saturdays he gave his mind a complete rest before the duties of the Lord's Day. He usually spent the whole day in his workshop. Walking and carpentry were his chief recreations and Saturday was the day for carpentry. At the rear of his little cottage he had fitted a tiny room for this purpose. [page 40]

18. Habit of Combining the Spiritual and the Practical.

Yet even this recreation was accompanied by spiritual exercises, for he always fasted on Saturdays, and, while he was working, poured out his soul in communion with his Lord. This habit of combining the spiritual and the practical was characteristic of Chapman. He prayed as he walked or as he did household duties. In fact, he refused to recognize any artificial distinctions between religious and material duties, but was always conscious of the Divine command: "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23-24). [page 41]

19. Sought Salvation of Wealthy and Affluent.

He never sought the patronage of the wealthy or influential, but he did seek to bring them to a knowledge of salvation. [page 43]

20. Walked 10 Miles to a Friend's Home.

Chapman loved to take the ten-mile walk to his friend's house, for they were both lovers of Scripture, each desiring to do all the Lord's will. [page 44]

21. Did Not Follow the One-man Ministry Approach.

The keenness of Chapman to have a gifted colleague in the work at "Ebenezer" was easy to understand when we realize that he was anxious to move away from the conventional "one-man" ministry. He felt that if there were two men of gift from the start, the position would be more clearly understood by everyone, and the Lord would raise up others to minister with them. It was in this spirit that Müller and Craik went jointly to Bristol. But this was not the Lord's will at Barnstaple at that time, and Chapman had the difficult task of waiting for the gifts to appear, and then encouraging their exercise. [pages 44-45]

22. Weekly in the Pulpit as God's Messenger.

They felt that they were listening to a true man of God, and, as conversion followed conversion, they discovered that God had given them an effective evangelist. There was no jealousy among other brethren, no thought that it was wrong for Chapman to be in the pulpit week after week as the Gospel messenger. Certainly no one gave utterance to the God-dishonoring argument that a Spirit-given evangelist must become stale and repeat himself after some weeks. Indeed, they knew from the Scriptures that the same man might be God's appointed messenger in a town *every day* for years, and never become a mere bore, or take to himself powers beyond the will of God. [page 51]

23. The Unconverted Observed Chapman's Life.

One thing is certain, that a great number of unconverted people followed Chapman's ministry week after week. God used his personality as a vehicle for conveying truth to their minds. It provided continuity—an important factor in evangelism. Many came because they saw the man at work in the town during the week, serving others without a thought of himself, and living Christ. The Spirit used this to give great practical force to the message, and week after week men and women were born again. [page 52]

24. Did Not Rebuke Publicly.

There was no ranting or cheap emotionalism in the services. Not all took part in this meeting were as gentle and cultured as Mr. Chapman, but his example and influence went a long way towards overcoming the peculiar difficulties which surround the so-called "open" meeting. If a brother who had no spiritual message persisted in holding forth, much prayer would be offered. If the trouble continued, he would be spoken to very gently and lovingly. Chapman never followed the unhappy practice of

administering a public rebuke to a brother while pretending to address the Lord. [page 52]

25. Hymn Practices Held Weekly Learning Chapman's Hymns.

The hymns sung were many of them new, at least as far as the words were concerned, for the Brethren had early discovered that there was a deficiency of hymns centering upon the Lord's Table, and stressing the priesthood of all believers. There was no choir, but musically-minded friends were encouraged to meet together during the week to practice tunes, so that hymns in some of the rarer metres need not be confined to the same few tunes. It was at these informal hymn-practices that some of Mr. Chapman's hymns first began to be sung. [pages 52-53]

26. Communion Showed a Directness to God, not Common in Established Churches.

Many who had been brought up in the Establishment or in traditional nonconformity, found a new inspiration in the Lord's Supper as it was conducted at Grosvenor Street. It was the sense of directness in the approach to God which impressed most. Even some who had always believed in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers now discovered for the first time what it really involved. The whole congregation offered up spiritual worship as the Spirit led them. During the first three-quarters of an hour one brother after another would rise to offer praise, or point briefly to Christ in the Scriptures. Then Mr. Chapman would break the bread. When all had partaken, a teacher would minister the Word, or the task would be shared by two. Often Mr. Chapman would speak at this point, and in an exposition lasting twenty minutes or more, would instruct the mind and challenge the conscience and will... [page 53]

27. Great Christian Fellowship and Communion.

With Mr. Chapman as head of his own table, with invited guests (sometimes as many as twenty missionaries would be there at a time) I could not but be deeply influenced by the atmosphere of Christian fellowship and communion. Some of the Lord's people staying there were under a cloud of trial and frustration, but were uplifted and released from bondage through the ministry of the Spirit through God's servant. [page 58]

28. Pastor's Works Are Not Spectacular.

The work of a pastor is never spectacular. The true pastor toils on month after month, year after year, dealing with the special difficulties of God's people, seeking to lead them on in the grace of God, "in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." To the onlooker his work seems much the same, year in, year out. But though the general pattern of it varies little, the details are constantly changing, for an observant pastor finds that no two of the Lord's people have exactly the same problem. Since,

however, these details are nearly always confidential, the full story of a man's pastoral work cannot be told. [page 72]

29. Fellowship, Scripture, and Order Existed in Chapman's Home until Death.

The warm fellowship, sincere reverence for Scripture, and Scriptural order which existed there at his death, provided the best monument of his seventy years' labour. It illustrated the fact that a man's work can be consolidated when he exercises his gifts largely in one district. [page 73]

30. Brought Scripture into Conversations.

When he entered a house he would usually have some Scripture in mind, and would wait his opportunity to introduce it into the conversation. But he did not do this in an ordinary way. For example, one day, upon being asked how he was, he replied that he was burdened. With some concern the enquirer said: "Burdened, Mr. Chapman!" "Yes," he replied. "He 'daily loadeth us with benefits.'" [page 74]

31. Learned from Young People.

Chapman was always watchful of the interests of young people. He did all in his power to encourage young Christians to grow in grace. He knew the art of leading the young, rather than driving them. He would listen to their hopes and aspirations with unfeigned interest. He believed he might learn something from the youngest believer. [page 76]

32. Cared for Children.

Chapman had time for the children. It is a poor shepherd who has no interest in the lambs. [page 77]

33. Even the Young Given Confidence in the Security of the Believer.

The children of his great friend, Henry W. Soltau, loved to talk to Chapman, and they told him that they had trusted the Lord Jesus for salvation. "Children," said he, gathering them close around him, "some day—it may be years ahead—the great enemy Satan will certainly try and make you doubt the love of Christ. But remember: 'No man shall pluck you out of His hand.'" [page 78]

34. Wanted to Please Christ.

In all his service for the "flock of God," Chapman had at heart the interests of others. Yet he never attempted the unChristlike task of pleasing everybody. He once said to a friend: "My chief desire is to please Him. If I please my brethren, I am glad. If I fail, I am not disappointed." [page 82]

35. Encouraged Missionary Work.

From the start, Chapman was keenly interested in missionary work. Two of his earliest converts, William Bowden and George Beer, went out to work for the Lord in India. Chapman had invited Anthony Norris Groves to speak at “Ebenezer” on his return from India in 1835, and these two young salwarts were held spell-bound by his description of the needs and opportunities that abounded in that land. Finding that Groves was bent on gathering a party of workers to return with him to the Indian field, they had felt this was God’s call. [page 83]

36. Sayings of William Hake.

“Believe not your eyes if they contradict your ears, provided it be God that speaks.”

“There is no willow on which to hang your harp in the holiest of all, and that is our proper dwelling place.”

“I carry my library—66 volumes—in my pocket.”

“If our circumstances find us in God, we shall find God in all our circumstances.”

“When considering your faults and inclined to dejection concerning them, don’t talk with yourself—don’t keep bad company. Talk with the Lord.” [page 96]

37. Macartney’s Visit to Chapman.

One visitor was the Rev. H.B. Macartney, M.A., who describes his visit in his book “England, Home and Beauty.” He had heard much of Mr. Chapman and wished to see and hear him for himself. “I learned,” he wrote, “that he was pre-eminently holy; a man who rose early, prayed much, and always walked with God. I was told that he always spent Saturday apart; that the day was passed in communion; that no exercise was taken, except indoors at the lathe; and that a visitor who had been once been obliged to break in upon his solitude beheld his face as it had been the face of an angel.” [page 97]

38. Chapman Sought Scriptural Knowledge from Others.

Macartney describes how he first heard Chapman speak. “After tea we wrapped up again and went out to a cottage meeting, and for the first time I heard Robert Chapman expound the Scriptures. Deep called to deep as he warmed to his subject. The impression made on my mind is almost all that I can remember, as I took no notes; but as his Bible closed I felt like an infant in the knowledge of God, compared with a giant like this. Returning home I was confounded that he, instead of I, was taking the place of infant as we walked together. He sought to know all that I knew of God, and so I believe it is always with him, as if his visitors knew more and loved more than he.” [page 98]

39. Chapman Cared for Others.

“Tuesday, December 10th. We all retired to rest about nine o’clock last night; for the hours at New Buildings are particularly early—breakfast at seven, dinner at noon. Mr. Chapman always retires at nine and rises at four. From four o’clock until twelve he is principally occupied with God. It was laid on his heart very soon after his affections had become fixed on better things, that the world stood in great need of intercession, and that intercession was to be peculiarly his vocation; therefore his first and best hours are given to prayer. Devotion does not, however, in any way interfere with the energies of life. He preaches to 800 souls every Sunday; he undertakes pastoral work; he attends to the minutest bodily and spiritual wants of a stream of visitors, some of whom stay for an hour, some for a month; he is the mainspring of a great evangelistic and Bible work in England and Spain; he corresponds with men like George Müller, and with seekers and workers in various parts of the world. Nor is he shut up during those first eight hours. For instance, it was his practice, till quite recently, to go round to every door and take away the boots of his guests, to clean them with his own hands. He called me at my own request at five. I was awake and waiting for his step. He put his venerable head in at my door just at the hour, lighting my candle and giving me my morning portion: ‘As for God, His way is perfect.’ A little after, he came to guide me to a little sitting room, where a chair and warm rug were placed beside the table furnished with a reading lamp, and just in front of a lovely fire...” [age 99]

40. Aim at the Filthiness of the Flesh to Overcome It.

On the subject of gaining the mastery over besetting sins, he was very positive. He said: “Give yourself to attacking the filthiness of the spirit more than the filthiness of the flesh—pride, selfishness, self-seeking, etc.—these are the ringleaders; aim at them. Fight ye not with small or great, save only with the King of Israel. While you are occupied in gaining the victory over little sins, great sins will be occupied in gaining the victory over you. When the great sins are overcome, little sins fall with them.” [page 100]

41. Love and Patience Showed in His Dealings with Others.

More and more as the years drew on, he was occupied with prayer, and with the writing of letters to God’s people. To Henrietta Soltau he wrote when he was 94: “I cannot but rejoice with you in your resolve to see fellow-labourers in China. They all, with dear Brother Hudson Taylor, have ever been in my heart at the throne of grace. Go, and the Lord be with thee.”

Since Chapman’s views were not entirely those of Henrietta, or of Hudson Taylor, this letter is another example of the sincere love and patience which marked all his dealing with others. To many who lived and worked with him, he represented the true spirit of

the Brethren movement. They felt the intentions of the 1830's were carried out in practical detail in his life. [page 102]

42. Drawn to Chapman's Words and Example.

Some who had turned away in disgust from the fleshly strife which had marred the witness of some assemblies, were drawn to New Testament principles by Chapman's loving words and example. History has shown that "Brethren-ism" is the worst of all "isms," for it takes the sublimest truths and makes them the tools of party strife. But the true principles of Brethren, as worked out in Chapman's life, compel the admiration of all spiritual people, and, for that matter, of many unconverted folk. [pages 102-103]

43. Gentle in Rebuking the Younger Brethren.

Chapman hated false doctrine with a perfect hatred. On the great foundation truths of the faith he was uncompromising. But he never read heresy into the words of those who were innocent of it. He was particularly gentle with younger brethren, and nothing that he ever said to any of them was known to discourage, or to check the development of their gift.

On minor issues he held that any break-off of fellowship was a sin. His views on prophecy differed considerably from those of most of his "Brethren" contemporaries—as his little-known book "Suggestive Question" reveals—and he did not completely agree with Hake on some matters of interpretation. But this was never made a subject of bitter contention. [page 103]

44. Loved All in His Area.

Large crowds attended the funeral, which took place at Barnstaple. Christians were present from all over the country. Baptist, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Anglicans mingled with Brethren at the graveside of him who had taught them by word and example that all born-again people were brethren and sisters in Christ. Though he had never swerved an inch in his belief and practice regarding the worship and government of the church, they knew that he had loved them all, and had sincerely mourned the lack of unity of judgment amongst God's people. They felt that they had lost a brother indeed. [page 109]

45. True Nature of New Testament Christianity.

The modern Christian, looking back upon the life of Chapman from a distance of some years, may well ponder whether God has not given us the example of such a life to serve as a witness to the true nature of New Testament Christianity. [page 110]

46. Listen to One Who Wounds Us.

We only know the heart and thoughts of others by proof of word or deed. If a brother wound us, we should first hear him thoroughly, before we judge him to be in fault; but in many cases we may find ourselves not less to blame than our brother. [page 112]

47. Mutual Intercession instead of Accusation.

When mutual intercession takes the place of mutual accusation, then will the differences and difficulties of the brethren be overcome. (Job 42, 8-10). [page 113]

48. Humility in Fellowship.

Humility is the secret of fellowship, and pride the secret of division. [page 113]