

J. C. Ryle: Prepared to Stand Alone by Iain H. Murray, Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, PA, (2016). (49 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols.)

1. Evangelicals Accomplished Much in Britain and Abroad.

At the beginning of that century no group approached the evangelicals in what they were accomplishing both at home and abroad. It was evangelicals in the Church of England who led in the formation of the Church Missionary Society (1799), the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), and the Church Pastoral Aid Society (1836). In Parliament it was evangelicals who did most to bring down the Slave Trade. [page 32]

2. Upon Adversity, Unbelievers Seek for Other Systems for Answers.

For various reasons, people may for a time appear to belong to Christ and hold orthodox belief. Upbringing, self-advantage, and culture may hide for a while what is missing. But let the disadvantages of being an evangelical Christian come to be experienced and those unrenewed by the Holy Spirit will turn to whatever other system has greater appeal to their nature. [page 36]

3. True Greatness Consists of Giving.

...among the children of God he is reckoned the greatest who does the most to promote spiritual and temporal happiness of his fellow-creatures. True greatness consists, not in receiving, but in giving,—not in selfish absorption of good things, but in imparting good to others, —not in being served, but in serving—not in sitting still, and being ministered to, but in going about and ministering to others. [page 51]

4. Writing Clearly and Concisely Is Difficult.

...it is an extremely difficult thing to write simple, clear, perspicuous, and forcible English. ...To use very long words, to seem very learned...is very easy work. But to write what will strike and stick, to speak or write that which at once pleases and is understood, and becomes assimilated with a hearer's mind and a thing never forgotten—that, we may depend upon it, is a very difficult thing and a very rare attainment. [page 60]

5. A Short, Pithy Text Does More Good.

The value of expository preaching is continually pressed on ministers in the present day, and not without reason ... The idea, no doubt, like every theory, may be easily ridden to death; and I believe that with ignorant, semi-heathen congregations, a short, pithy text often does more good than a long passage expounded. [page 60]

6. Losing the World's Approval.

Let a young person go to every ball and theatre and race-course, and utterly neglect his soul, and no one interferes ... But let him begin to read his Bible and be diligent in prayers, let him decline worldly amusement and be particular in his employment of time, let him seek an evangelical ministry and live as he had an immortal soul, —let him do this, and the probability is all his relations and friends will be up in arms. “You are going too far,” “You need not be so very good,” “You are taking up extreme lines,” — this is the least that he will hear. ... If a man will become a decided evangelical Christian he must make up his mind to lose the world's favours; he must be content to be thought by many a perfect fool. [page 67]

7. A Sentence of Sound Theology.

Marsh could express much sound theology in one sentence, for instance: “We are justified freely, by grace; meritoriously, by Christ; instrumentally, by faith; evidentially, by good works.” [page 78]

8. Ryle's Opinion of an “Eligible Woman”.

Eligible, in his terms, meant “a woman who was a real Christian, who was a real lady, and who was not a fool.” [page 80]

9. God's Sovereign Plan.

...a testimony which William March liked to quote: “It is all for the best. I am in the hands of a sovereign God,” but he would later see that all along, “God was fitting me for an after-work in a way I did not know.” [page 83]

10. Private Prayer Is the Strength of Ministry.

A common interest in the ministry of Robert Murray M'Cheyne had taken them to the scene of his ministry in Dundee, where he had died in 1843 at the age of twenty-nine. Ryle was impressed with the words of one of his hearers who told them that it was not simply M'Cheyne's words and teaching that were the cause of his influence: “You must have seen the man, and heard him, and known him, and have been in company with him, to know what a man of God he was.” Ryle would not speak of his own experience of fellowship with God but he would underline to others the part which prayer must play in an effective ministry:

“It was said by an old writer that Luther's habits of private prayer and John Bradford's habits of private prayer were things more talked of than practiced and imitated. Private prayer is one grand secret of the strength of ministry. It is here that the roots of the ministry, practically speaking, are to be found. The ministry

of a man that has gifts, however great, but who does not give the closet the principal place, must sooner or later become jejune and ineffective.” [page 83]

11. A Minister Preaches the Word.

A minister’s sermons should be incomparably the first thing in his thoughts. He is not ordained to be a schoolmaster, a relieving officer, or a doctor, but to preach the Word. [page 94]

12. Preached Individual Texts.

Unlike numbers of preachers today he did not treat expository lectures as the standard for preaching. He commonly took individual texts. He did the same when he preached to children, and when—as was often the case—he accepted mid-week invitations to preach elsewhere. The latter, with rare exceptions, he would do only if he could be back home that same night, to be present if his wife needed anything. “I have frequently,” he recalled,

in the depth of winter driven distances of 12, 15, 20, or even 30 miles in an open carriage to speak or preach, and then returned home the same distance immediately afterwards, rather than sleep away from my own house.” [pages 94-95]

13. Ryle’s Opinions of Puritan Writers.

But it was from the Puritans, in particular, that he gained most for his own ministry. What he read in Bickersteth he proved for himself. There he had read concerning the Puritans: “All *Thomas Manton’s Works* are worth having”; of John Flavel, “Few more practical, popular and edifying”; of Thomas Brooks, “A popular, lively, and practical writer”; of Richard Sibbes, “very tender and striking”; of John Owen, “an invaluable treasure of divinity.” That this school of authors became his regular companions in these years is clear. [page 98]

14. The Christian Life Is a Life of Faith.

Ryle’s reading of Puritan authors put light and strength into his ministry. He saw their spirituality and warmth as characteristics of the best evangelical teaching. From them he learned that the Christian life is primarily a life of faith, and he was passing on to others what he had first preached to himself ... [page 99]

15. Called Attention to Lives of Eminent Christians.

Ryle early saw the value of calling attention to the lives of eminent Christians as a means of awaking interest in what they stood for. With that in view he spoke on “George Whitefield” to the Church of England’s Young Men’s Society in London in

1852. The next year he followed this with another London lecture on “Baxter and His Times”. [page 100]

16. The One Book – the Bible.

He advised his readers, “Use commentaries; but be a slave to none. Call no man master ... Men read many books, but neglect ‘the one Book’” (Preface, vol. 3; 1873). “If I can make the Bible more plain and interesting to any man’s soul, I shall be abundantly content” (Preface, vol.2; 1869). [page 110]

17. Doing Nothing Was Not Tolerated.

Doing nothing was the one thing not to be tolerated in children. Seeing young fellows lounging at the corner of the street, he was heard to tell them, “Don’t stand there *idle*: it would be better if you went and got into mischief.” [page 113]

18. Meeting the Working Class.

“In spite of many a prediction of failure,” Ryle believed, “it was clearly proved that when you go out of your routine path to meet the working classes, they will come and meet you.” [page 115]

19. Be a Student of the Word.

This was evangelism with doctrinal content. Like Ryle, Miller urged the republication of the Puritan works, with their “massive theology baptized with all the rich unction of Christian experience.” It was Miller who wrote the General Preface to the twelve volumes of the *Works of Thomas Goodwin*, reprinted in James Nichol’s series, convinced that if preaching were to become what it ought to be, “ministers must be, as were Puritan giants, students. Less public work. Fewer committees. Less serving of tables.” The alternative would be “a disastrous state of malady—an ill-stored, unlearned, untheological clergy.” [page 115]

20. A Leader in the Church of England’s Church Association.

Ryle became a main speaker at the Association’s Conference, spoke regularly at the Annual Meetings, and was elected a Vice-President in 1870. He spoke on deputation for its work at various times and places. One of his best-known addresses, “What Do We Owe to the Reformation?”, was delivered on behalf of the Association, and in printed form sold 88,000 copies in one year. [page 117]

21. Urged Others to Be a Part of Leadership.

He was not surprised to find few men of his convictions present, but he concluded that for evangelicals to absent themselves was to leave all leadership to others, and to miss influencing those who gain a better understanding of evangelical belief. He reminded

his fellow evangelicals that, “Great is the power of the face, the voice, the eye”, and that it was possible to like a man without agreeing with him. [page 119]

22. Attend Assemblies Even Though One Is in the Minority.

In large assemblies of men convened to consider ecclesiastical and religious questions, we may confidently assume that there are always some present whose hearts are right, and who are willing to support the truth, even though they sit in bad company, and are for the present silent and overawed. There is no warrant for staying away from assemblies and councils merely because we happen to be in a minority. [page 120]

23. The Authorized Version Was an Admirable Translation.

He was perfectly at home with the Greek text, and conceded short-comings in the translation of the Authorized Version, but wrote “I doubt much whether we should gain much by throwing it aside. Taking it for all in all, the authorized English version is an admirable translation. I am quite content to “let well alone.” [page 122]

24. In Interpreting Scripture, Use Your Own Judgment Prayerfully.

... cautions his younger readers to remember that commentators “are good helps, but they are no infallible. Use your own judgment prayerfully and diligently. Use commentaries; but be a slave to none.” [page 122]

25. Leading Readers to Respond to the Words of Christ.

The great aim of all he wrote was to lead readers to respond to the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” “This is the end for which I desire to write and preach; and it is of little use or value to write and preach for anything else.” [page 124]

26. Obeying God’s Marching Orders.

Moving at my age is a very treacherous and expensive business. Old trees transplant badly.

I have little heart for any move except into heaven. The last twenty years have swept away nearly all I knew and loved best, and I feel sadly alone.

But after all the time is short. I am a soldier. The Captain of my salvation seems to say, “these are your marching orders”. I have nothing to do but to *obey*.

Pray for me. My heart is very heavy. [page 126]

27. Short Sayings of JC Ryle.

Fitzgerald, biographer of Herbert Ryle, was to write in 1928, “Even today, nearly fifty years after he left Stadbroke, J.C. Ryle is vividly remembered there. Some of his pithy

sayings, such as ‘If the cap fits, wear it’, are still repeated.” Other well-known sayings of Ryle were: “What we weave in time we wear in eternity”, “It matters little how we die, but it matters much how we live”, and “It is hard for an empty bag to stand upright.” Those who wanted Ryle in /Liverpool knew that he would be no “empty bag”. [page 129]

28. The Gospel Center to His Message.

The gospel itself was ever the most important part of whatever he spoke or wrote, and the gospel meant the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, Whether he was addressing Members of Parliament, or a rural congregation, whether university undergraduates or children, the primary intention was evangelistic—present Christ to both the unbeliever and the Christian, as with Paul, “whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man, in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col 1:28). [page 133]

29. Nothing Added to Christ in Salvation.

Nothing is to be added to Christ in salvation, nothing is to be joined with him in honour, nothing can satisfy apart from him. “Christ is all”—“All building without him is on sand, which will surely fall. All working without him is in the fire, where it will be consumed. All riches without him have wings and will fly away.” [page 133]

30. Evangelism during Ryle’s Era.

Such men as Henry Varley evangelizing in Stradbroke, and D.L. Moody in Liverpool, would have his support. He believed with Whitefield that “it was far better for men to be uncanonically saved than canonically damned.” [page 134]

31. All Members of the Church Teach and Preach.

It is high time that the old tradition that the clergy alone ought to teach and spread religious knowledge should be exploded and cast aside forever. To do good and diffuse light is a duty for which all members of Christ’s church are responsible... Christians ought to tell others that they have found medicine for their souls, if they see them ignorant and dying for want of it. What saith Apostle Peter? “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another” (I Peter 4:10). They will be happy days for the church when that text is obeyed. [page 135]

32. Truth Needs to be Stated with the Right Degree of Emphasis.

One doctrine magnified out of proportion to other truths will limit the usefulness of any ministry. Similarly, a secondary truth constantly delivered as though it was the main truth will produce unbalanced Christians. Truth needs to be stated with the right degree of emphasis in relation to other biblical teaching. [page 135]

33. The Second Advent of Christ.

Certainly it was his “deep conviction that the second advent of Christ is one of the leading truths of Christianity”. He constantly preached the need for Christians to live in that expectation, yet he avoided such fanciful details of interpretation as would ultimately endanger the second advent keeping the place it ought to have in evangelical thinking. [page 136]

34. Enter at the Strait Gate and Believe on Christ.

Both obligation and faith, law and gospel, were rightly present in Ryle’s preaching without any contradiction. Sinners are both to “strive to enter in at the strait gate” and to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” [page 137]

35. Sanctification Is a Process.

He believed that by focusing on faith alone in sanctification, and by making the “victorious life” rest on one act of faith, the New Testament was being distorted. Certainly faith plays a vital part in sanctification, but it an ongoing, not once-for-all, part, and not the only part. Faith is alone in justification, and justification is an act, not a process; but sanctification is a process, one in which the believer’s obedience, discipline, and duty are conjoined with faith. [page 137]

36. Believing and Doing.

Samuel Rutherford [said], “The way that crieth down duties is not the way of grace. Believing and doing are blood friends.” [page 137]

37. Free Salvation If Believe and the Elect.

He did not hesitate to preach, “In my Master’s name I offer you complete salvation if you will believe; free salvation if you will believe; everlasting life if you will believe.”

But at the same time Ryle in no way passed over, or sought to moderate, those truths which assert the certainty of the salvation of an elect number, chosen before the foundation of the world, and loved with a special and efficacious love. Because numbers have thought that the consistency of both sets of statements cannot be explained, they settle to preach one or the other, in the unscriptural presentation of Arminianism or Hyer-Calvinism. Ryle, however, did not seek to explain but preached both truths and exemplified how being an evangelist and a Calvinist ought to belong together. [page 138]

38. Distinctions between Good and Bad in Eternity.

Ryle viewed with dismay how too many were condoning the omission of plain, New Testament language, and never warned their hearers:

Beware of manufacturing a God of your own, —a God who is all mercy, but not just, —a God who is all love, but not holy, —a God who has heaven for everybody, but a hell for none, —a God who can allow good and bad to be side by side in time, but will make no distinction between good and bad in eternity. [page 139]

39. Study and Knowledge of the Flock Is Necessary for a Sermon.

Sermons which come *only* from the study are not likely to be messages which bind speaker and hearers together in a common bond of affection and sympathy. A preacher *must* be a visitor and be ready to preach everywhere. Few circumstances can justify the omission. If the excuse be offered that there is too much public work to do, to give time to the private, then the priorities are wrong. He deplored

a growing disposition throughout the land, among the clergy, to devote *an exaggerated amount of attention to what I must call public work of the ministry*, and give comparatively too little attention to pastoral visitation and personal dealing with individual souls. [page 141]

40. Real Love for People Necessary for Ministry.

He believed that a man who only speaks of Christ from behind a pulpit should not be surprised at having small usefulness. Real love for people will take a preacher into their homes, and it will affect the way these same people hear him in public. Preaching confined to churches is not New Testament Christianity. [page 142]

41. Sheltering Home for Children.

One of the first links was with a Mrs Birt who had organized a Sheltering Home for children and struggled for support. This work centered on arranging the emigration of children, orphan or destitute, to homes in Canada and to adoptive parents who would be “orderly and churchgoing”. Between 130 and 160 were sent out each year, an estimated 2000 in seventeen years. [page 170]

42. Ryle’s Wife and Daughter Involved in Helping Needy Women and Girls.

In the work of helping needy women and girls, Ryle took second place to his wife, who was active in several societies, as well as his daughter Isabelle. Farley names three such agencies, with the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society heading his list. This was the Society with whom Amy Carmichael would go to India in 1895. An invitation from Ryle to Miss Ellice Hopkins led to the setting up of a Midnight Mission to prostitutes in Lime Street, Liverpool, and between fifty and sixty women were said to have been reclaimed in four months. [pages 170-171]

43. Unity Built on God's Truth.

No doubt we all love unity; but we must distinctly maintain, that true unity can only be built on God's truth. No doubt we must not withhold the right hand of fellowship from any faithful brother, because he does not think exactly like us; but we must understand who the men are to whom we extend the right hand. [page 179]

44. Do Not Water Down Truth or Doctrine.

He feared evangelicals were in danger from this spirit and pleaded, "For Christ's sake let us beware of trying to heal our breaches by lowering our standard of doctrine, and watering our statements of truth in order to avoid giving offence." [page 186]

45. The Bible and the Saviour Are Infallible.

Through forty years he had taught that Scripture gives us, not "the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth" (1 Cor. 2:13). "He that holds a Bible in his hand should remember that he holds not the word of man, but of God. He holds a volume which *not only contains, but is God's word.*" "To me and many others it is God's mouth-piece to a dark and fallen world." "I abhor the idea of a fallible Bible almost as much as the idea of a fallible Saviour." [page 221]

46. Increase of Evangelical Teaching.

What Ryle put first must be first today: "we want a great increase of plain, thorough, unmistakable Evangelical teaching." This has always been God's order for restoring the church in the past—first the recovery of the authority of Scripture, along with the raising up of men, anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit, under whose preaching there comes new life, and new rallying points—churches which are "the pillar and ground of the truth". [page 223]

47. The Law First.

Let us bring the law to the front and press it on men's attention. Let us expound and beat out the Ten Commandments, and show the length, and breadth and depth, and height of their requirements. This is the way of our Lord in the Sermon of the Mount. We cannot do better than follow his plan. [page 227]

48. Biblical Message for the Structure of Society.

This means that the message of the Bible is not simply for individuals. It announces law for the structure of society. Failure to recognize this Ryle saw as disaster for Britain. It allowed professing Christians to be unconcerned whether the ten commandments were taught in schools, whether the Christian Sunday was publicly observed, and whether the Protestantism of the nation's Act of Settlement was retained. Instead the idea gained acceptance that such things had no bearing on the welfare of a country,

whereas, “the Church, which only cares for saving souls and the State, which only cares for the education of minds, are both making a vast mistake.” [page 229]

49. God Needs No Permission from Man to Build His Kingdom.

Grace is the steady truth for hard times. God is in no need of permission from man to build his kingdom. “All who are given to Christ will come to him. No obstacle, no difficulty, no power of the world, the flesh, and the devil, can prevent them.” What he had begun he will complete. What Satan seeks to do will all be put down for ever when Christ chooses to finish his work. Then praise will be forever. [page 236]