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How does Christ make men 'fishers of men'?

In answer to this question, consider spiritual fishing two ways: first, as to the office and work itself; and second, as to the success of it.

First, he makes them fishers as to their office, by his call, which is twofold, outward and inward, by setting them apart to the office of the ministry; and it is thy business, O my soul, to know whether thou hast it or not. But of this more afterwards.

Second, he makes them fishers as to success; that is, he makes them catch men to himself by the power of his Spirit accompanying the word they preach, and the discipline they administer:

The preaching of the cross - unto us which are saved, is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18).

Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance (1 Thess. 1:5).

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He it is that brings sinners into the net which ministers spread; and if he be not with them to drive the fish into the net, they may toil all the night, and day too, and catch nothing.

O my soul, then see that gifts will not do the business. A man may preach as an angel, and yet be useless. If Christ withdraw his presence, all will be to no purpose. If the Master of the house be away, the household will loath their food, though it be dropping down about their tent-doors.

Why shouldst thou then, on the one hand, as sometimes thou art, be lifted up when thou preachest a good and solid discourse, wherein gifts do appear, and thou gettest the applause of men? Why, thou mayst do all this, and yet be no fisher of men. The fish may see the bait, and play about it as pleasant, but this is not enough to catch them.

On the other hand, why shouldst thou be so much discouraged (as many times is the case), because thy gifts are so small, and thou art but as a child in comparison of others? Why, if Christ will, he can make thee a fisher of men, as well as the most learned rabbi in the church: *Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength* (Ps. 8:2). Yea, hast thou not observed how God owned a man very weak in gifts and made him more successful than others that were far beyond him in parts? Has not God put this treasure in earthen vessels, that the power might be seen to be of him? Lift up thyself then, O my soul, Christ can make thee a fisher of men, however weak thou art. Follow thou him. My soul desires to follow hard after thee, O God!

Be concerned then, in the first place, O my soul, for the presence of God in ordinances, and for his power that will make a change among people (Ps. 110:3). When thy discourse, though ever so elaborate, shall be but as a lovely





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song, O set thyself most for this. When thou studiest, send up ejaculations to thy Lord for it. When thou writest a sermon, or dost ruminare on it, then say to God, 'Lord, this will be altogether weak without thy power accompanying it.'

O power and life from God in ordinances is sweet. Seek it for thyself, and seek it for thy hearers. Acknowledge thine own weakness and uselessness without it, and so cry incessantly for it, that the Lord may drive the fish into the net, when thou art spreading it out. Have an eye to this power, when thou art preaching; and think not thou to convert men by the force of reason: if thou do, thou wilt be beguiled.

What an honourable thing is it to be fishers of men! How great an honour shouldst thou esteem it, to be a catcher of souls! *We are workers together with God*, says the apostle. If God has ever so honoured thee, O that thou knewest it that thou mightst bless his holy name, that ever made such a poor fool as thee to be a co-worker with him. God has owned thee to do good to those who were before caught. O my soul, bless thou the Lord. Lord, what am I, or what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me to this?

Then seest thou not here what is the reason thou toilest so long, and catchest nothing? The power comes not along. Men are like Samuel, who, when God was calling him, thought it had been Eli. So when thou speakest many times, they do not discern God's voice, but thine; and therefore the word goes out as it comes in.

Then, O my soul, despair not of the conversion of any, be they ever so profligate. For it is the power of the Spirit that drives any person into the net; and this cannot be resisted. Mockers of religion, yea, blasphemers may be brought into the net; and many times the wind of God's Spirit in the word lays the tall cedars in sin down upon the ground, when





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they that seem to be as low shrubs in respect of them, stand fast upon their root. Publicans and harlots shall enter the kingdom of heaven before self-righteous Pharisees.

What thinkest thou, O my soul, of that doctrine that lays aside this power of the Spirit, and makes moral suasion all that is requisite to the fishing of men? That doctrine is hateful to thee. My soul loaths it, as attributing too much to the preacher, and too much to corrupt nature in taking away its natural impotency to good, and as against the work of God's Spirit, contrary to experience; and is to me a sign of the rottenness of the heart that embraces it. Alas! That it should be owned by any among us, where so much of the Spirit's power has been felt.

