

**DR R W DALE**  
David C F Wright, PhD

Robert William Dale was born in London on 1 December 1829.

He was educated for the Congregational Ministry at Spring Hill College, Moseley in Birmingham. It was originally a private house merely called Spring Hill and under the patronage of George Storer Mansfield (1764-1837) and his sisters, Elizabeth and Sarah.

In 1853, Dale became joint pastor of Carr's Lane Chapel, Birmingham with John Angell James (1785-1859) who had joined the church in 1805 and was ordained the following year. He was born in Blandford Forum, Dorset and originally served for seven years as an apprentice linen-draper. He died in 1859, when Dale became sole pastor.

Six years earlier in 1853, Dale received his MA in philosophy from the University of London. He also acquired a law degree, LLD, from the University of Glasgow and Yale University gave him his DD, which he seldom used.

He did not use the term Reverend and normally read his sermons so as to be accurate, precise and clear. He was a man of integrity, intelligence and moral values. He advocated improvement in social matters such as health, sanitation and living conditions in Birmingham. He fought for free education for all and for the understanding of the links between poverty and crime. He also approved of trade unions, if they protected the rights of workers, but he did not support militancy. He was sometimes termed as the advocate of the civil gospel.

Politically, he was a Liberal but he did not preach politics. He worked with Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914), another Liberal, who was the President of the Board of Trade and, later, Secretary of State for the Colonie and the father of Neville Chamberlain.

Dale attacked Forster's Elementary Education Bill of 1870 which contained the notion that, as established churches were funded by the State, so education should include the teaching of politics and train pupils how to vote. Dale and other Christians felt that the church should be separate from the State and that the influence of the church on young people was preferable since it elevated morality. He also advocated the disestablishment of the Church of England believing that the church was a spiritual brotherhood of all true believers.

Today, the State tells us what to teach children. Christianity and the Gospel is not to be taught but the theory of evolution is taught as a fact. Homosexuality is taught as acceptable and is living together outside the bonds of marriage.

This would not have been the case in Dr Dale's time. He and his chapel advocated truth and morality and had done so for many years. In fact, Carr's Lane Chapel goes back to 1758 and the current building was erected in 1820. It is now a United Reformed Church. In Dale's time the teaching majored on the supremacy of Christ and His moral teaching.

Dale was a true preacher and so respected that Edward Onslow Ford produced a statue of Dale in 1898 which was rediscovered in 1995.

There is a street in central Birmingham, Dale End, named after him.



He was the Chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1868 and President of the International Congregational Council in 1891.

But Dr Dale should not be merely regarded as a social reformer or administrator. There was a time, not so long ago, when the preaching of the social gospel was paramount with instructions to be kind and nice to everyone but this meant that the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ was demoted. There are many theological works from his pen such as expositions of the epistles to the Ephesians and James, Christian Doctrine, The Role of the Church, The Ten Commandments, Christ and the Future Life etc.

In his on the Commandments he raises many interesting issues. When dealing with the honouring and love for parents he raises the problem of children who are not loved. He also promotes family life and the sanctity of marriage whereas today adultery is not so termed but called living together or an affair.

A child born out of wedlock is not illegitimate or a bastard but a love child.

Of course, in Dale's time, the Victorian age, standards were better and there was no television or the internet and not the advertising of immorality.

He died on 13 March 1895. He had achieved much in his life and we need men and women like him today.

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