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PROF. SHEDD'S SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE

INSTALLATION OF REV. F. B. WHEELER,

IN

BRANDON, VT., MAY 29, 1850.

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S E R M O N ,

PREACHED AT

THE INSTALLATION OF

REV. FRANCIS B. WHEELER,

IN

BRANDON, VT., MAY 29, 1850.

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Published by request of the Church and Society.
PRINTED AT THE CHRONICLE PRESS, WINDSOR.
1850.

S E R M O N .

2 TIMOTHY iv. 1, 2.

I CHARGE THEE THEREFORE BEFORE GOD, AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO SHALL JUDGE THE QUICK AND THE DEAD AT HIS APPEARING AND HIS KINGDOM; PREACH THE WORD.

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THE solemnity and earnestness of this charge of the Apostle Paul to Timothy indicate the importance which he attached to preaching. As a Christian minister, Timothy is charged, as in the immediate presence of God and of the Redeemer of the world, first of all, and as his principal business, to "preach the word." The other duties of the ministry are by no means undervalued or left out in the body of instructions given to his son Timothy by the veteran minister; yet from the position which this duty of proclaiming divine truth has in the series of injunctions, we must conclude that it was first and foremost in the Apostle's estimation. That which he regarded as the great work of the ministry comes first into his mind, drops first from his pen, and forms the weight and solidity of his charge.

In setting this high estimate upon the preaching of the doctrines of Christianity, the Apostle Paul did but take the views of the great Head of the Church himself, as they may be gathered both from his precept and example. The last command of the Redeemer,—that command in which he would naturally concentrate what was of highest importance to the Church and the world,—was, "Go, *preach the gospel to every creature*"; and active as our Savior's ministry was in other respects, the height and steadfastness of his activity appears in that incessant constancy with which he taught and preached the truths of His religion,—in the market-place, by the way-side, in the temple, by the well-side, at the marriage feast, at the grave's mouth, to the rich, to the poor, to Pharisee, to publican and sinner,—in every

place where he found a human creature, to every susceptible and unsusceptible heart.

Furthermore, the history of the Church furnishes the strongest proof of the prime importance of preaching the word. There is no fact that stares out in a more marked way from the pages of ecclesiastical history than the fact that the flourishing periods of the Church have ever been distinguished by the full and clear enunciation of Christian doctrine, and that the periods of superstition and decline have been equally distinguished by the famine of the word of God. That Church which we call the very Anti-Christ makes little of the sermon in its religious services, and nothing has contributed so much to carnalize and stifle all religion in the minds and hearts of its members as this lack of preaching.

If the proclamation of Christian doctrine has been of the highest importance in all ages of the Christian Church heretofore, it is pre-eminently so in this age. Probably the civilized world were never more engrossed in the cares and interests of this life than at this present moment. The soul of man was perhaps never more swallowed up in the concerns of this mortal state,—was never more profoundly buried in the interests and movements of this “little life,” than now. A high civilization, growing out of an astonishing advance in the arts which tame and subjugate the forces and elements of the material world, and make them subservient to man’s physical wants, is constantly bearing man away from that spiritual world for which he was originally made, and causing him to forget his true end and destination. Instead of the spirit’s ruling the flesh, and spiritualizing it into its own image and likeness, the true process is reversed, and by reason of the steady influence of the earthliness by which it is environed, the soul seems to be unmoulding its essence, and to be turning in the five senses. “What shall I eat, what shall I drink, and wherewithal shall I be clothed?” are, perhaps, more than ever before, the great questions for rational and immortal man!

Since science and art are making so much of this material world,—are turning it to so great account,—it acquires an undue importance, an excessive reality, for man. The foundations of that globe upon which cities can be founded, and canals cut, and railroads made, cannot be removed so easily. This earthly existence, so full of comforts, and luxuries, and embellishments,—so crowded with the exciting and fascinating interests of home, of society, of polities,—so

alive with the stir and motion of commerce, and trade, and manufactures,—this teeming mortal life cannot be a vain, empty show. Thus man does practically reason, shut up as he is, perhaps more closely than ever before, in the great process that is going on in the world,—deceived and blinded as he is, perhaps more than ever before, by the glare of his merely temporary state.

This condition of man in the present age calls loudly for the preaching of the word. How can man be made to correct his estimates and to see that the fashion of this world passeth away, except by the annunciation of those truths which pertain to another life ? How can he be made conscious of his immortality and accountability, of his tendency to eternity, of his fundamental relations to God, of the utter impossibility of finding substantial good in the creature,—how, in short, can he be made to reverse the relations which he actually does sustain to time and eternity, so as to die to the former and live to the latter,—except by the preaching of Christian doctrines ? These are the only truths that can rouse man from the slumbers of sense ; and the present age of the world, above all others, needs to have them pressed upon its notice, and forced into its consciousness, with all the depth, energy and clearness of a Paul or a Luther.

Although the efficiency of Christian doctrine depends ultimately upon the right state of the heart, and consequently upon that Spirit which works directly upon the heart, yet there is a right as well as a wrong way of unfolding and enforcing this doctrine. There is a true and legitimate method of preaching the truths of revelation, by following which, other things being equal, the greatest success will follow. There is a method of preaching inspired truth which is the most consonant with the nature of that truth and with the constitution of that intellectual and moral being to whom that truth is addressed, and in the line of this method, other things being equal, Christian doctrine will have the freest course, and produce its greatest effect.

Seeing, then, that the preaching of the word is of so great importance, and that success in it depends so much, under God, upon the correctness of the general method in which it is pursued, let us for a while consider

The true method of Preaching : its influence upon the Preacher himself, upon the Church, and upon the Congregation.

Inasmuch as every true method is the method of nature, we get a
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clue to the true method of preaching by contemplating the nature of the system to be preached. The system of revealed truth is sometimes called a “*body* of divinity.” The metaphor, like all genuine, *lively* metaphors, contains some literal truth. Christianity is not one doctrine by itself, but is many doctrines, co-ordinated, co-organized, harmonized, into one living scheme. It is not one single member, but many members in one body. Its doctrines, it is true, differ in the degree of their importance. Some are so central and vivifying that they may in a certain sense be said to be Christianity itself. Still, strictly speaking, the Christian Religion—the “*Word*” which the preacher is to preach—is a *system* of doctrines, no one of which is isolated from the rest, but every one of which is inwardly and organically connected with the rest. The proof of this every man can see for himself, either theoretically or practically. No man can theoretically run out a single doctrine of Christianity to its remoter consequences, and apprehend it in all its relations and connections, without being led through the whole system. And no man can be practically impressed by any one of the Christian doctrines,—can *savily* receive any one of them into his own heart,—without, at the same time, and by this very act, receiving the whole Christian religion into his soul. If a man has truly repented, he believes, and he hopes, and he loves. If a man has truly believed, he repents, and he loves, and he hopes. Thus, whether a man practically or theoretically contemplates a particular doctrine of the Christian system, he cannot stop with the single isolated doctrine. Having begun, he is in for the whole. He has entered a charmed circle, and must now go in to the centre. He has touched one nerve, and the whole system feels the thrill. And blessed, thrice blessed, is that soul which both theoretically and practically has suffered itself to be seized by one of these living truths, and so, in the remarkable phrase of St. Paul, to be “swallowed up of life”!

True, efficient preaching has its ground, and origin, and support, *in the practical and theoretical knowledge of the Christian religion, considered as an organic system—as a great whole.* From profound doctrinal knowledge, resulting from the union of deep religious experience with calm reflection, springs the *efficient* power of the preacher, and that method of sermonizing which is natural only to the *theological habit* of mind, and which is *inevitable* to this, is the true method.

By this is not meant that the preacher should be merely a dry, technical theologian, or that the sermon should be merely a theological lecture. The preacher is not in the schools, but in the great congregation, and he must address the beating heart as well as the thinking head. He may, it is true, and he must, at times, make definite statements of doctrine, and maintain the truth upon rational grounds, and allow his sermon to take a systematic form. Indoctrination is a part of his work, and in order to this he must exhibit the doctrines, strictly defined, logically developed, in their organic connections, and in their marvellous adaptations. In saying, however, that the doctrinal method is the true method of preaching the word, reference is not had so much to this strictly systematic presentation of divine truth, as to that thoughtful yet glowing and devout discourse, which is thoroughly pervaded by the spirit and substance of Christianity. Preaching may be doctrinal, and yet not contain the formal statement of doctrine. The solid and substantial truth may be etherealized and diffused through the discourse, giving it consistence while it imparts vigor. The preacher may not cast his thoughts in a scientific or scholastic mould,—the form into which he puts them may be as free and artless as that in which the new convert tells of his first love,—and yet in every part of his discourse there may be evidence of most profound theological knowledge, and there may be a really profound handling of inspired truth. The original manner of getting at the subject, the strong yet easy grasp of it, the inexhaustible fertility which it exhibits under the treatment, the ebullient fullness, the warm devotion, the heavenly spirituality, together with the peculiar key note of the whole, all go to show that the preacher has bathed his soul in the lower deeps of Christian truth. The air and bearing, the tone and influence of the whole discourse, betoken a mind at home among the deep things of God, and a heart profoundly at rest and blessed among them.

In this way, then, is the preacher to preach the word. He is to *know* the truth in all its depth and comprehensiveness. He is to obtain this knowledge through a profound consciousness of truth in his own heart, and a profound contemplation of it in his own mind. From this union of Christian experience with devout reflection, there will result a depth, and clearness, and breadth of apprehension, a strength and freshness of feeling, and an absorbing interest and confidence in the truth that will arm the preacher with overwhelming power.

Such theological knowledge lays the foundation for a kind of preaching that contains all the elements of power and success. Though perhaps not formally, yet really, its contents are doctrinal. Now a doctrine is a *condensation* of the manifold instructions of Scripture upon a given point. It is *gathered* and *generalized* from the various contents of revelation. Preaching, therefore, of which the bone and marrow is *doctrine*, will be powerful, because the doctrine is a condensation,—is the very heart and essence of truth. It will be comprehensive, (1) because the doctrine is truth in a general form, allowing of unlimited reflection and universal application; and (2) because, as we have seen, it is not isolated, but is connected with the whole system of revealed truth. It will be clear preaching, because doctrine is distinct and definite statement; and it will be spiritual and edifying preaching, because its constituent elements are drawn from the word of God, and are God's absolute truth.

It is true that a certain kind and degree of power springs from even an incomplete and one-sided view of truth; but it is not the calm and grand power of that vision which surveys the whole. The mind that contemplates a doctrine by itself alone,—that pays no regard to the other doctrines which support it as its ground, or balance it as its complement, or sharpen and enforce it as its inference,—may doubtless preach it with great force and energy of a certain kind. It cannot, however, preach it with that solemn, spiritual power which produces an effect upon the *moral* as well as the intellectual nature. In this age of intensity there is great need of broad views,—of views which grow out of calm-eyed survey, as well as of sharp-eyed analysis. Such views of truth are the only *commanding* views.

The true model preaching, then, which we are ever to keep in our eye, is the growth of a mind and heart that have sunk into the great *system* of Christianity, and have there found their element. When it has become our delight and our second nature to contemplate the doctrines of Scripture as they are in themselves and in their connections,—when we live, move, and have our moral and intellectual being in the “word” which we are to preach,—then shall we bring out of our treasury things at once new and old; our discourse will have the power of old truth, and the freshness of a new revelation.

We turn now to consider the influence of such a method of preaching upon the Preacher himself.

The great and most important effect of this method is that it arms

the preacher with the power of the whole Christian system. Following this method, his reliance is not in himself, but in Divine truth ; his strength is not in his own feeble and finite faculties, but in the ideas, principles and doctrines of revelation.

Now any thing that throws the preacher out of himself,—that leads him to put his confidence in that which is objective, rather than in his own subjective abilities and acquisitions,—is of great worth to him. Aside from the moral benefit there is in going out of and away from ourselves, there is great intellectual benefit in absorbing ourselves in God and in God's truth. We are strong only in God. We are powerful only in the truth. The preacher who, in his sinful pride and self-confidence, seeks to produce an impression by means of his own force alone, upon that hardest of subjects the depraved human heart, makes an attempt analogous to the “dead lift” in mechanics. The creature, because he is a creature, must have some place to stand upon, and some self-sufficient power to fall back upon, or he can do nothing ; and of no one is this more true than of the preacher of the word.

This central standing place, and this self-sufficient power, the preacher must find in the being and attributes of God, and in the truth which he has revealed. Forgetting himself, and thinking nothing about his own personal ability, he must obtain such a clear intuition of Divine truth, and have in exercise such a hearty love for it, that it shall be all in all for him. Then will he be sanctified by the truth. He will be set free from that intellectual pride which is so apt to exist in the mind of one who like the preacher is called to instruct his fellow-men. He will also be delivered from that undue self-disparagement (which is equally sinful with pride, and is indeed a modification of it) which deprives the mind of its nerve and vigor. In short, he will be made a humble man in the true Scriptural meaning of the word,—a man who is too solemn and serious, too much impressed by eternal truth and eternal realities, to be vain of himself,—a man who has too awful and self-absorbing views of the infinite God, and of the eternal world, to vapor and strut here on “this bank and shoal of time.”

We cannot over-estimate this self-annihilating effect upon the preacher, of being engrossed in the great *system* of revealed religion. The preacher who is in such a case does not go a warfare at his own charges. It is no longer *he* that preaches, but Christianity in and

through him. Ceasing to rely upon himself, or even to think of himself, he becomes the organ through which the principles of the kingdom of God announce themselves. Losing all consciousness of himself in particular, his mind and heart are filled and fired with the consciousness of the truth alone. He is no longer, as man is naturally inclined to do, convulsively using his own strength to produce an impression, in order to his own renown, but he is wielding the tremendous power of another Being, in order to the glory of that Being. Standing in the centre of the great moral system, and identifying himself with God, he attacks and cannot be attacked, he overthrows and cannot be overthrown. Objections made against him are objections made against God,—resistance offered to him is resistance offered to that kingdom which the gates of hell shall never prevail against.

Now conceive the preacher to be thus enlightened and enlivened and empowered by the *system* of revealed religion ; imagine him to have had these doctrines, in their intrinsic and in their combined meaning, wrought into the substance and constitution of his soul by the Holy Ghost ; imagine him to have meditated upon them, and prayed over them, until all the habits of his mind and feelings of his heart have been formed and moulded by them ; imagine him, in short, to have become, by regeneration, and by his whole education and developement after that crisis in his history, an incarnation, as it were, of the word which he is to preach,—imagine such an one, I say, and is there on earth any higher, purer, more powerful agent ?

Without enlarging farther upon this point, or upon many others which might properly be discussed in this connection, we cannot leave this part of the subject without noticing the effect which the systematic knowledge of inspired truth has upon the preacher's immediate preparation for the pulpit.

It is obvious that the constant contemplation of a great system of truth like that of Christianity must induce a strong systematizing tendency. The mind of the preacher under such an influence receives a theological formation. It comes to look at every thing from the theological point of view, and in its relations to the religious interests of men. The mind of such a preacher ceases to be secular, and becomes serious, solemn, spiritual, in its bent and direction. As nature, and human life, and human history, and all that surrounds man, becomes poetic to the poetic mind, so does it become sacred and re-

ligious to the spiritualized mind of the preacher of the word. Naturally, and without an effort, he thinks in this direction, he feels in this direction, and he discourses in this direction.

And because both his mind and heart have undergone the discipline of a system as rigidly logical as it is profoundly saving and spiritual in its character, all the issues of his being are systematic. His thinking is not vague, his feeling is not dreamy and mystic, and his discourse is not rambling, because he is *indoctrinated*. For let it not be thought that this systematizing tendency is the death of feeling and devotion,—that what is gained by it in the head is lost again in the heart. True feeling—and religious feeling is such—is as much under the guidance of a regulating principle as thought, or any other agency of the human soul. Religious feeling, especially, is rational; i. e., it originates in truth, it is fed by truth, it is strengthened by truth, and it takes direction from truth. The purest and deepest feeling that throbs in the Christian heart flows directly from the apprehension of Christian doctrine. We *love* God most heartily and wholly when we most distinctly and really *know* that He is good.

The influence of such a habit and tendency upon the preacher's immediate preparation for the pulpit is most excellent. Being habituated to the systematic study of the Bible, the portion of Scripture which he selects as the theme of discourse will not be torn from its connection, and be made to serve as a motto to a sermon whose contents are by no means an unfolding of the seeming text. Knowing and feeling the vitality of the inspired truth he has chosen, especially in its relation to what precedes and succeeds it, his discourse is a genuine growth,—the swelling, bursting, leafing out, blossoming and fruit-bearing of a germ.

Furthermore, his discourse will always have a constitution. It will be constructed on some principle, it will be formed by some idea, because it is his *tendency* to think and discourse in this method. Easily and with interest to himself, pleasantly and with profit to his hearers, will his thoughts and feelings fall into a consecutive and connected series, the end of which can be seen from the beginning, and the beginning from the end.

Called upon as the preacher is to discourse a certain amount every week,—to speak edifyingly to Christians and convincingly to sinners a set number of times in a regularly recurring period,—a systematizing mind and a full heart are of incalculable value. That

preacher to whom the word which he preaches is the element in which he feels and thinks, and the form by which he constructs, preaches not only powerfully, but easily. His mind moves with freedom through the great circle of inspired truth. He is not necessitated to make an effort to fix his thoughts upon the doctrines he is to proclaim. He is *in* among them habitually, and the single discourse is thrown off with an energy, and yet with an exhaustive treatment, which are the free and natural movement of a mind and heart made strong and bold by the truth.

How much weariness of mind and body would the preacher be spared, how much of sinful anxiety, in preparing his discourses, would he be delivered from, if, like Howe, "his stores of thought were so great and so thoroughly digested that he could preach as methodically without preparation as others after the closest study." If he were filled with treasures of knowledge and wisdom, that vagrancy of mind and coldness of heart, which render the composition of sermons so difficult, could not exist. Premeditation and composition would be most delightful occupation for the preacher. He would engage in it with enthusiasm and warm devotion, for it would be but the vent and channel for the outflow of a mind full of divine wisdom and a heart surcharged and burdened with the ripest and richest feeling that enters into the Christian experience.

We turn now to consider the influence of such preaching upon the Church.

Its general effect is edification. It *builds up* the individual Christian, and the church as a body. And this is what the preaching of the word should do for the regenerated soul. By the supposition, the renewed man—the member of the church—has had implanted within his spirit the germ of perfect holiness, the principle of eternal life. This is still, to a great extent, an undeveloped germ—a latent principle—that is, it has as yet seized upon him and remoulded him but very imperfectly and feebly. The principle as the basis of final perfection, the germ as the source of complete sanctification, is, however, all in the Christian, for he will never be the subject of a second regeneration—no new principle will ever be implanted in him again. Like the principle of physical life to which it is constantly compared by our Savior, it can never undergo additions. It is a unit by itself, and the only thing to be done is, to feed, nourish, and develop it, with the food that is convenient for it. But though all, in him, the

divine life has not yet become the sole and undisputed principle of his being. The Spirit, it is true, lusts against the flesh, but the flesh still lusts against the Spirit. Only when the renewed soul has entered the heavenly state will the germ have completely unfolded itself,—the principle have obtained a full developement.

Such being the case, the Christian life here on earth must, from the very nature of the case, be a process and a progress. It must be a fight—in which the Christian, to be sure, is constantly superior to his enemy ; it must be a race—in which, indeed, he is ever ahead of his competitor ; but for all this, it must be a fight and it must be a race, until he enters into rest.

That, then, which connection with the church and the use of the means of grace is to do for the renewed man is, to unfold the germ, to develope the principle. The preaching of the word, therefore, so far as the Christian is concerned, is for the purpose of edification,—of building him up on the foundation which has been laid in regeneration, in all holiness and perfection. And that preaching which does not promote the internal growth of the church—which does not strengthen, and stablish, and settle, and ground its members in the faith, is not yet perfect however much it may promote the external growth of the church in the way of additions.

The preacher who preaches the word in its depth and comprehensiveness—who preaches the *whole* word, and the word as a *whole*,—edifies the church in the most solid and substantial manner. He does not exhibit the truth on one side merely, but on all sides. One side of the Christian character is not cultivated to the neglect of the other sides ; but the whole character, enlightened and enlivened by the whole truth, is built up in symmetry and strength.

I. To be more particular,—preaching of the character in question edifies the church, in the first place, in *knowledge*.

In his unregenerate state, man has no true apprehension of that world of truth to which, however, he stands in most serious and solemn relation by virtue of his being a rational spirit. He lives on, conversant only with that world of time and sense in which he is temporarily placed, and having no real and hearty knowledge of any truth beyond that which concerns his own selfish and sinful purposes. He is ignorant—radically and unfeelingly ignorant—of the truths of Scripture, and of the truths inlaid, for a wise and merciful purpose, in his own moral nature. He is ignorant of eternal truth.

Regeneration introduces a man, therefore, into a new and illimitable region of *knowledge*, as well as of holiness and happiness. When first brought out of nature's darkness, into the marvellous light of this region, his eye is dazzled and he sees but imperfectly. Though he has an apprehension that is true as far as it goes, and that renders him infinitely more wise than he ever was before, even though he understand all mysteries and all knowledge, still he knows but in part. It is his duty and destination to *grow in knowledge*—to make wider and still wider excursions in the region into which he has entered, and which is now to be his eternal residence. Though he has received the Christian religion into his soul, and has a knowledge of it sufficient to begin the divine life with, he has yet to learn that length and breadth and height and depth of it, which passeth knowledge. He is to discover more and more of the relation of divine revelation to his own soul, and so to discover more and more of the depth of his apostacy and alienation from God, and so to be made more and more humble and self-abased. He is to gain a clearer and more unclouded view of those doctrines which he at first sees through a glass darkly, and so to be filled with a more abounding and strong confidence in their truthfulness and trustworthiness. In short, the Christian is to *know* more and more deeply that the system of truth to which he has committed himself is *real* truth—the wisdom of God and the power of God to salvation.

Whether the Christian shall thus increase in divine knowledge depends, in the case of the great mass, upon the preacher of the word. Very few members of the church are so situated that they can devote themselves to the systematic and profound study of scriptural truth in private ; and even these are greatly helped by the Sabbath ministrations. The church generally must be led further into the world of religious truth by the Preacher. The church as a body can come to a fuller and clearer Christian experience—can be led further into the deep things of God—only through the systematic exposition of Christian truth by the ambassador of Christ. The knowledge of the body of believers, under the present arrangements of the economy of Grace, is mainly dependent upon the instructions of the Sabbath day.

Doctrinal preaching—that preaching which is the fruit of a profound and systematic knowledge of the Christian religion—enlightens and instructs the church, so that it makes real and solid increase

in knowledge. Mere superficial and one-sided views of Christian truth add nothing to the intelligence of the church. The church itself may be presumed to have advanced as far as such views. But preaching that is impregnated with doctrine—with doctrine in its connections in the great whole, and in its profound relations to the human soul—preaching that penetrates, that reveals, that solemnizes, that flares light, that diffuses life, that feeds the Christian soul—such preaching edifies in knowledge. Co-operating with the Holy Ghost, it makes the once ~~semi~~^{ever} blinded and ignorant man *wise* in the highest meaning of the word. Though the range of his human knowledge may be narrow, yet in that true wisdom which shall remain when mere earthly knowledge has passed away, he is wiser than the ancients. He knows himself and he knows God; and these are the two eternal realities for every man, and this is the only stable and substantial knowledge.

Such preaching induces a contemplative habit in the church. It tends to reproduce itself in the hearer, because of its consecutive and suggestive character. The ministration of the word, from Sabbath to Sabbath, is a slow and thorough unfolding of divine truth, which in this way insinuates itself into the mind and heart, and becomes part and particle of them. The church, in such case, acquires an apprehension of the truth that is moral and spiritual as well as intellectual—a knowledge that awakens feeling and sets the best powers of the soul into action.

II. In the second place, preaching of the character in question edifies the church *in love*. It enlists the feelings of the church in great ideas, principles and doctrines, and thereby elevates it above that low, earthly region in which are found the jealousies and heartburnings which alienate Christians from one another. It pre-occupies them with that which is heavenly and spiritual, and leaves no room for ill-will and contentions. Many a sin would be avoided if the Christian were but raised above the sphere of sin in his thoughts and feelings. A partially sanctified spirit must render the yoke of Christ easy, by keeping, as constantly as possible, in the higher regions, where temptation does not come. If it descend into the appropriate sphere of carnality, where it cannot fail of being assailed, it will find the whole strength and firmness of religious principle drawn upon.

By habituating the members of his church to profound and soul-elevating views of truth, the preacher of the word delivers them

from innumerable causes and occasions of ill-will and self-seeking. Their interest—their chief interest—is in eternal truth ; and thus they keep aloof from the clash of the petty interests of earth. There is indeed no happier or nobler human being than one whose mind is on high, and who is kept from the belittling stir and turmoil of sin by the power and the “ music of nobler thoughts.”

But more than this,—such preaching exerts a positive influence upon the soul of the hearer, which powerfully disposes it to Christian charity. For divine truth, like the divine Being, is love. It seeks the well-being of the spirit to whom it addresses itself, and in proportion as the spirit becomes conformed to it, is it filled with devout and heavenly affection for God and all his creatures. Even as a power of conviction and condemnation, revealed truth is a form and an organ of love and mercy, and the rightly-feeling heart goes out towards it as its best friend, even when bleeding under its strokes. “ Let the righteous smite me,” it says, “ it shall be a kindness ; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil.” When a Christian man clearly sees the truth—when he distinctly beholds what is—he has no disposition to quarrel with it, but sweetly bends his whole soul to it, and takes it to his inmost heart. His reason sees it is *truth*—that it is *verily so*,—and his will sways itself in accordance with it, with all the freedom, and all the necessity, with which God himself is good and does good.

The Christian oftentimes, upon discovering how full of envy and hatred he is by nature—how destitute he is of that simple, unselfish, unconscious love for God and man which was the constant issue of the heart of Jesus—the Christian oftentimes, on making this discovery, endeavors to remedy the evil by direct efforts to control and change himself in this particular. Let him not stop this effort, but let him by no means stop with it. Let him absorb himself in the truth—let him raise his thoughts above these finite objects, which awaken and stimulate this selfishness, to those pure and holy truths which shine aloft like stars—let him hide the doctrines of Scripture in his soul, like leaven which a woman took and hid among three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened—let him become edified in knowledge—and he will insensibly and gradually become edified in love.

The preacher who is able to show distinctly and visibly to his Christian hearer the *truth as it is in Jesus*, will mould that hearer

at will. For by the supposition the hearer is Christian at heart, and hence there is within him something to appeal to—something upon which divine truth can seize. In this case, through the presentation of the preacher, Christian truth meets the Christian heart—like meets like, and there is of necessity a result. When, for instance, by means of that clearness and depth of vision that arise from the thorough and systematic apprehension of the Christian scheme, the preacher has brought a doctrine or a duty into sun-light before a Christian man's mind, there is but 'one way open before that Christian man; and he will walk in it, because he is a Christian, and so far as he is a Christian. Have you not sometimes, my Christian hearer, had the truth laid before you with such distinctness and fullness, and self-evidencing power, that it commanded itself to you, and your dull heart began to swell, and your darkened understanding began to lighten up, because the truth—the veritable thing—had been simply and really shown? Perhaps you had been in a stupid and unfeeling state for a long time previous, and yet upon the bare exhibition of divine truth the fountains were broken up and the waters of the dead sea moved. Your earthly affections—your envy and malice, and hatred and pride, disappeared, upon beholding the serene and lovely countenance of heavenly truth; and spiritual affections, peace, joy and love, flowed through you in currents.

It is in this power of simple, unadorned yet essential truth that the power of the Scriptures themselves consists. How often, for example, some calm, unpretending yet pregnant saying of Christ *speaks* to the Christian in the hour of sadness and doubt, and by its very simplicity and truthfulness works a change in his inward condition, as marked as the emergence of the sun from behind a cloud! How often is the whole soul of the Christian filled with light and love when, after meditating upon a portion of Scripture, its full meaning bursts upon him! Nay, must not too many of us confess that the most marked evidence of our being possessed of true Christian principle, is not to be found in the *habitual* state of our mind and heart in relation to divine truth, but in those moments (too short and too rare) when our hardness and impenitence melts down into contrition and love, upon the clear vision of some precious doctrine of grace?

If, now, the preacher of the word can *exhibit* the truth in its simple reality, he will edify his church in love. He will develope that

which God has implanted. That root and principle of heavenly love, which is so barren and unfruitful because it is not nourished enough, will be made to grow, and bud and blossom like the rose. He will draw upon the reserved fund of holy life, and Christians will manifest far more of religion.

We turn now to consider the influence of that preaching which is the fruit of the systematical and doctrinal knowledge of the Christian religion, upon the congregation.

I. In the first place, such preaching predisposes natural, unregenerate men to believe the real evangelical truth.

Although evangelical truth is rational, and commends itself to the reason when it is once lodged in the reason, it is nevertheless repelled by the natural heart. For this cause, there is many a man who, from his circumstances, is led to listen to such a presentation of truth every Sabbath, who does not even intellectually believe in it. There are many men, it is to be feared, who, though sitting under the droppings of the Christian sanctuary, do yet in their religious belief make no advance upon the morals of the better Pagan philosophers. Their creed is, after all, no more than the doctrines of natural religion, brought out into greater clearness and harmony by the light of the Christianity under which they are living. The *peculiar* and *distinguishing* doctrines of Christianity—the *guilt* of man and the *atonement* of Christ, the depravity of man and the regeneration of the soul—do not vitalize these doctrines of natural religion for them—they do not even enter into their speculative belief. It is to be feared that there are many men in our congregations who do not give the evangelical system the cordial assent of even their intellect, but listen to the preaching of it with a lurking skepticism. It seems to them too hard upon human nature, and too severe in its drift and bearings, to have emanated from that Being who is love.

The only remedy for such skepticism of intellect as this, is that strict, systematic preaching, which exhibits the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. There is no doubt that the Christian religion, as it is presented in the Scriptures, is a complete and consistent whole in itself, and is capable of being conveyed as such into every being having a rational soul, and is capable of being there felt to be the veritable truth of God. The Christian preacher is not called upon “to make the worse appear the better reason.” He is called upon to preach a system which, in comparison with all other

systems, may claim, as its Author did in comparison with all other beings, to be *the Truth*. If, therefore, the preacher can but *get at* the Christian scheme, he will find himself aided, and not at all hindered, by it. Pure and severe though it may be in reference to the corruption of man, if the truth in its reality be but made to sink down into the ears of the hearer, his understanding *must assent*, even if his will does not. So far as the intellect is concerned, logical and systematic preaching can *compel* assent with all the force of geometrical reasoning.

A congregation growing up under such preaching is predisposed, from its intellectual training, to receive the unadulterated evangelical statement of Christian doctrine. It has, by the supposition, been taught *all* the doctrines of Christianity, and each in its intrinsic and related meaning. Though the heart of the hearer may not yet have been changed, his head is right. So far as theory is concerned, he takes high ground and true ground. Accustomed to strong and thorough-going statements, his is no timid and trembling mind. Though the truth which he intellectually receives strikes down all his hopes of eternal happiness so long as his heart is unrenewed—though it convicts and eternally damns him—his head is too clear, and his intellect too manly and honest to attempt to make that not to be, which really *is*. He takes truth as he finds it, and as it finds him.

Let us not undervalue this orthodoxy of the intellect. True, it will not save the soul, for it may co-exist with a selfish heart and a sinful life ; but let us ever remember that, as a means, as an instrument, as a preparation for something more, and something more powerful, it is of great value. Is not a well indoctrinated congregation a more hopeful one than an unindoctrinated one ? Is there not more hope of a man who from a child has been taught the Scriptures, than of one whose mind as well as heart is vacant of Christian doctrine ?

II. And this leads us to say, in the second place, that the preaching under consideration prepares the natural man for the converting influences of the Holy Spirit.

Although there may be, and doubtless are, cases of conversion by the bare power of the Holy Spirit, breaking abruptly into the soul and working an entire change in it, yet this is the exception, and not the rule, in the kingdom of grace. In most cases, the saving influence of the Divine Spirit is exerted after previous preparation. Usu-

ally, the man has been somewhat enlightened and solemnized by the doctrines of Scripture, before he is regenerated by the Holy Ghost. Conversions may be expected to be most frequent among a community that is leavened with religious truth.

For the Spirit of God is also the Spirit of Truth, and although it unquestionably operates as Spirit upon spirit—working directly upon the substance and constitution of the human soul—it nevertheless does not operate in a vacuum. It prefers a being somewhat familiarized with truth, somewhat enlightened and solemnized by it. *In such a soul, with what it contains,* it works most frequently and efficaciously. The Holy Ghost most readily comes to “His own,” and “His own” are the principles and doctrines of Scripture. Finding a human soul thus pre-occupied and pre-possessed, the regenerating Spirit enters, as into an appropriate and congenial sphere of operation, sets home with effectual power what has hitherto exerted but an ineffectual influence, and renders preparatory and preventient grace renewing and saving grace.

Now a congregation accustomed to the preaching of a studious and devout *theologian*—in the habit of hearing discourses weighty in matter and logical in manner, and truly doctrinal in character—becomes insensibly better and better prepared for that crowning work of the Spirit, without which the preaching of the gospel, and all the means of grace, nay, even the Christian religion itself, are of no ultimate worth. Such a congregation is remarkable for the grave and sober views which its members, though unconverted men, take of religion. Though not yet savingly acquainted with it, they know very clearly and profoundly that it is *the great interest, the chief concern.* Every sermon that they hear strengthens their conviction of its vast importance; and the pulpit is thus throwing the shadow of eternity in upon human life, and making that serious and earnest, at least, which otherwise would be a frivolous and trifling vanity.

III. Intimately connected with this, in the third place, is the influence which the preaching under consideration exerts upon men in their social and civil relations. There can be no doubt that all true *conservatism* in government and society has its root and ground in the religious truth that is diffused through community. That reverence for God and sacred things which we have seen to result from the thorough preaching of the word, more than all feelings else, keeps community on the side of law and order. The effect of such

indoctrination is visible and felt long after the preacher has gone to his reward. How often does the fifty-years ministry of one devoted, devout, learned and thorough divine continue to propagate a most intense conservatism of thought and feeling through generation after generation ! Nay, whence did the law-abiding and law-revering spirit which so eminently characterizes New England originate ? Whence, in fact, originated all the firmest principle and the purest patriotism of the nation—all that the American Union could RELY upon in a CRISIS ? Did it not spring from the doctrines of Christianity, lodged in the minds and hearts of our fathers by as serious, pious and doctrinal a ministry as the world ever saw ? That ministry may have thought that, amid the forests and snows and sparse population of New England, they were doing but little, and may have prayed God not to despise the day of small things ; but it yet remains to be shown, by greater changes, too, than have yet occurred in human history, that any body of men since the creation, with the exception of the apostles, have accomplished so much. By holding to the naked truth—by preaching most determinedly, most systematically, and, if you please, most severely, the naked truth—these men did a work that *lasts*, and a work that makes all other things last. For not until the principles of the Pilgrims shall have been crushed to death by the superincumbent weight of opposing doctrines from abroad, or have been eradicated by the springing up of roots of bitterness in our own soil, will our country and constitution come to ruin. With these principles circulating through us, we may expect to continue as a nation so long as the world stands, and to accomplish that high destiny which is so manifestly connected with our *religious* birth and education as a nation.

Such are some of the effects upon the preacher, the church, and congregation, of that preaching which is the fruit of the systematic apprehension of Christianity.

I. And in view of the whole subject it is evident, in the first place, that any man who, in the providence of God, is permitted to listen to the stated preaching of the Word, is indulged and distinguished by a privilege of which he cannot realize the full worth, until he is in eternity. The stated preaching of the gospel, with what is connected with it under the economy of redemption, constitutes the one great antagonism to all the influences and tendencies of time and sense ; and if it is not brought to bear upon a human soul, that

human soul will inevitably be swept along in the general deluge of worldliness and sin. If, therefore, a man does not attend upon the preaching of the word, he puts himself without the pale of solemnizing, arresting influences ; he keeps within a sphere and a circle, all of whose influences are sedative and lethargic upon his moral nature ; he keeps himself out of a sphere and a circle, all of whose influences are awakening, illuminating and enlivening to that nature.

In a Christian land, therefore, we must, in one sense, let that soul go, which does not conscientiously place itself under the influences of the preached word. The great means and instrumentality appointed by God for human salvation, being neglected or rejected, nothing but the remarkable interposition of God can save ; and the remarkable interposition of God must not be relied upon.

II. And, in the second place, it is evident that you, my Brother, who are this day loading yourself down once more with the toils, anxieties and responsibilities of the Christian ministry, are yet entering upon a work in which great power is at your command, if you know how to get hold of it. The Christian system is a powerful system, intrinsically, and its Author is Omnipotence. The minister of Jesus Christ is called upon to do a great work ; but he is not called upon to do it in his own authority, or in his own strength, or through his own system of doctrine. He is called upon to preach—i. e. to proclaim, merely—the Word of another than himself—the Word of GOD. He is called upon to labor in the strength of another than himself—the strength of GOD. *Believe* this truth, my Brother. Go out upon it with your whole weight. As a minister of the gospel among this people, live, move, and have your being in God and in God's truth, and not in man or any of man's works. Then you will be blessed of God personally, and will be a blessing to the people of your charge.