

Preaching and the Preacher.

ONE of the most significant texts dealing with this subject in the Word of God is: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine." Here we find the Apostle, taught by the Holy Spirit, teaching Timothy, the young ambassador of Christ, that consistency of conduct and character is to be reckoned the preacher's first consideration. Of course, consistency of doctrine with the Scriptures cannot be too highly estimated. Yet, in this instance, consistency of the man with the object of his work is put first. Christ, surely, had the same thought in His mind when He said, "Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men." We have the same thought in Isaiah: "I will make thee a new, sharp threshing instrument, having teeth": there is the Divine preparation for forcefulness in service. That preparation is more clearly pointed out at the close of our Lord's ministry: "Ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me." It is the companionship of Christ which fits the man to be an effective witness of the Gospel. The popular essayist, F. W. Boreham, writes, "I am sick of the discussions concerning the various mental or intellectual qualities of different preachers. As though anything of that description could account for the varied success in their work. Whereas, behind all that, the secret of success lies in the spiritual preparation of the soul."

The best college for the preacher is a rich, spiritual experience. He must know at first hand the things of which he speaks. Even the Master taught this concerning Himself: "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." His greatest servant, the apostle Paul, witnesses to the same: "I certify you that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man." C. H. Spurgeon took that sentence as the text of his great sermon entitled *Our Manifesto*, to be found in *Messages for the Multitude*. In it he says, "Truth may so really become our own, that it is as though we had not taken it from the lips or pens of others." In another verse Paul elaborates his meaning: "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." As an illustration of the Apostle's teaching, Dr. Thomas Phillips, of Cardiff College, has said that he asked a leading evangelist how his teaching kept so fresh. The reply was, that he sought to break down at the feet of Christ every few weeks. What a lesson for us lies behind these thoughts, inspired and otherwise! Do we always retain the joy of forgiven sin? Is the delight first

experienced, when the Spirit of Adoption taught us to say, "Abba, Father," still filling our minds? Does the renewal of our nature, springing from the New Birth, make its presence felt as in the early hours of our Christian lives? Is prayer truly a converse with the Almighty? The answers we give to these questions will, in a great measure, decide whether we, as preachers, are really qualified for our sacred task.

What we have written hitherto has to do with the general preparation of a true ambassador of Christ for his work. But there are five outstanding characteristics of the man who is likely to be used in preaching. There must be a true humility of spirit; a conceited man is in danger of being set aside by his Lord. There must be full surrender of will to know both the Master's errand and the message. A warm affection to Christ and souls is indispensable. Faith in the promise, presence, and power of Christ's Spirit is equally requisite. And diligence in the work, both of prayer and preaching, cannot be omitted. That they may be more easily remembered, we will put them in five words commencing with the same letter, and then consider each for a while. *Lowliness; Listening; Loving; Leaning and Labouring.*

I. **LOWLINESS.** Self-conceit is fatal to the preacher's success. No fact is plainer in Scripture than this—"Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." How humility shines forth in the characters of God's greatest servants! Abraham, in his notable prayer concerning Sodom, says: "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." Moses was declared to be the meekest of all men of his time. The dear Son of God said of Himself: "I am meek and lowly in heart." Paul described himself as "less than the least of all saints." A little child, just converted, was, in the Apostle's eyes, of greater consequence than himself before God. A very frequent hearer of the late C. H. Spurgeon said that, in the middle prayer of the service, the great preacher would constantly petition that he himself might be forgotten and hidden behind the Cross of his Master. Boston, in his little work on *Man-Fishing*, reminds preachers how that the fisher himself must be hid if the fish are to take the bait.

Poets have put this needed characteristic of a true preacher in memorable verse.

If thou couldst empty all thyself of self,
 Like to a shell dishabited;
 Then He would find thee on the ocean shelf,
 And say: "This is not dead!"
 And fill thee with Himself instead.

Some present-day critics have found fault with the following popular hymn, but the majority of us are only too glad to sing, if not to sigh, it out :

Oh, to be nothing nothing!
 Only to lie at His feet,
 A broken and emptied vessel,
 For the Master's use made meet.

It is dangerously near to blasphemy when credit for results in preaching is taken to ourselves. In the midst of Christ's ministry, when the Pharisees attributed His miracles and parables to Beelzebub, He warned them against the unpardonable sin. To dare to speak of the Divine Unction accompanying our message, and bringing it home to the hearts of hearers, as though we were the source, is to arrogate to another the power which the Spirit alone can bestow. A true humility, a self-effacement, lowliness, here is the first step towards being used as the messenger of Grace to guilty souls.

II. LISTENING. The preacher must be fully surrendered to the will of his Lord, as in the beautiful picture of the servant of God: "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God." During a recent furlough it was the writer's privilege to be waited upon by a young man who had been carefully trained as butler in a great mansion. The way in which the skilful servant looked to the eye and hand, and even to the turn of the head, as suggesting some needed service, was a striking illustration of the passage quoted. Here are others: "The Lord hath given me the tongue of the learned" (we will take the Revised Version for the last word, "them that are taught") "he wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth my ear to hear as the taught." "The Lord God hath opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." The opening of the ear, of course, refers to the piercing of the ear of the servant who desired to remain in his master's service. This entire surrender of thought and will; this listening for orders; is beautifully pictured in our hymn:

Thou glorious Victor, Prince Divine!
 Clasp these surrendered hands in Thine.
 At length my will is not my own,
 Glad vassal of a Saviour's throne.

David, waiting for "the sound of the going in the mulberry-trees"; the evangelist, Philip, leaving the revival in Samaria at the Word of the Lord, to go upon the road that was desert, where he found the statesman-enquirer: the Apostles surrendering

their will, when it was not Divinely permitted to be carried out : "The Spirit suffered them not"—are all instances of this whole-hearted listening for Divine orders.

The preacher needs to wait upon his Lord to know where and what to speak. An evangelist of the present day has said that, while he has served the Lord in that capacity for sixty years, he has never once asked for a mission, as far as he can recollect. The place of service will be pointed out to the listening soul. In Hallenbach's *Passion for Men* the author tells of the American soloist, Bilhorn. He was conducting a mission in Reedsburg. After retiring to rest one evening he was aroused at midnight by the inward conviction that he was to take his moveable organ on to the street. The people in the house thought it a foolish procedure. He saw a light in a neighbouring dwelling, and found eighteen men sitting round a gaming table. He suggested to sing to them. Having their permission, he sang, "Where is my wandering boy to-night?" He broke down during the song, and fell on his knees to pray. The result of this was that sixteen of the men in the room made public confession of yielding to Christ, before Bilhorn left the town. Let us listen for the Spirit's instructions where He would have us deliver the Word.

The message also must be obtained from the Lord. In a Ministers' Conference held in Spurgeon's vestry during his lifetime, the great preacher being in the chair, one was telling how texts would come to him without being especially sought. During family prayer, while reading the Word for personal benefit, sometimes suggested by an incident during the day, the passage to be preached upon would come into his soul, as a voice from heaven. While the speaker was detailing this experience, Spurgeon wiped away the tears, which were always near the surface with him, and said : "My brother, that is exactly the way God provides me with my texts as a general thing." Lowliness of mind in the preacher must be accompanied with the listening attitude, waiting for the Master's directions.

III. LOVING. It has been well said that devotion to Christ is the measure of the preacher's efficiency. This is borne out in Church history, by the example of the men who have been most prominent in the preaching of the Cross. After the times of the Fathers, and during the Dark Ages, there is no name more prominent in the list of the Church's great preachers than Bernard of Clairvaux. After he had conducted a Mission in a European city the citizens erected a monument, that the time of blessing might be ever memorable. Upon it they inscribed the one word "Jesus." During the last few years of his life, Bernard preached exclusively on Solomon's Song. How many

of us to-day have hearts so aflame with affection for the Saviour, that for a whole twelve-month we should be willing to preach from that glorious poetical reflection of the communion of a soul with the Divine Lover? Of all the many works which Andrew Murray has left, perhaps the one fullest of sacred love is his exposition of the Hebrews, entitled *The Holiest of All*. In chapter after chapter the affection of God's great servant for his Master is the chief impression made upon the reader's mind. A literary gem in great danger of being lost, illustrating a preacher's love for his Lord, is that section of the Metropolitan Tabernacle Hymn-book, now out of print, which was entitled the *Golden Book of Communion with Jesus*. Spurgeon collected there the warmest expressions of passionate affection for Christ he could find in any poetical literature. How well the writer remembers seeing him advance to the railing of the platform, to give out one of these choice melodies of love; such as:

Oh, Love Divine! how sweet thou art!
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up by Thee?

or

Emptied of earth I fain would be,
Of sin, and self, and all but Thee;
Wholly reserved for Christ, who died,
Surrendered to the Crucified.

or

Jesus, these eyes have never seen
That radiant form of Thine;
The veil of sense hangs dark between
Thy blessed face and mine.
I see Thee not, I hear Thee not,
Yet Thou art oft with me;
And earth has ne'er so dear a spot
As where I meet with Thee.

Before the preacher had got through the first few lines of the hymn he was giving out, the tears would be streaming down his cheeks.

The result of this passion of love to Christ in the preacher, means an affectionate enthusiasm for the salvation of souls. The motto of the Moravians was: "To win for the Lamb that was slain, the reward of His sufferings." The strayed sheep are precious because the Owner is so dear. The lost jewels are valued because He to whom they rightfully belong is loved. The prodigals are sought and led home because the Divine Elder Brother longs with much compassion for their return. We cannot feel a great affection for Christ without having the passion for souls burning in our breasts. God give us grace to stir up within ourselves this *loving* characteristic of a true preacher.

IV. LEARNING. The preacher's strength comes from his sole confidence, his implicit faith, in Another. The power of the Holy Spirit is that to which the true servant of God must ever look for success in his work. And now comes the oft-debated question; what about the baptism of the Spirit? Does it always come with a crisis in life, or is the filling received in the same simple manner as the forgiveness of sins? God forbid that we should undervalue the experience of men who can date their great usefulness from some glorious hour when the Spirit of God took full possession of their souls in an evident manner. It was so with Christmas Evans; when climbing Cader Idris, he tied his pony to the post of a gate, and kneeling behind the hedge, received the conscious endowment of power. It was so with Dr. F. B. Meyer, when, turning his back on the tent in Keswick, he climbed Skiddaw, and received the wondrous gift. It was so with Torrey, when he fell off his chair in his study under the power of the Spirit coming upon him. These are Pentecostal visitations with which some men have been favoured. But the preacher, in general, has no need to wait for such a crisis in his life. Let him ground his believing expectations upon: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law . . . that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Standing, in thought, on the blood-stained grass under the Cross, as once the believing soul received the putting away of guilt, so now it may receive the filling of the Holy Spirit. Did we say *may*? Nay, it *must* receive the indument of power through simple, child-like faith in the promise, or the ministry can never be accompanied with the Divine energy requisite.

Dr. Alexander McLaren has left us a valuable legacy in his *Secret of Power*. The title of the volume is taken from that of the first sermon. In it he shows the secret of failure on the part of the disciples, who could not heal the demoniac lad. "They could not," says the wise author, "because they did not believe they could." Against the black background of the unbelief still prevalent amongst us to-day, the doctor gives the threefold ground upon which a perfect confidence of sure results of preaching the Gospel can be based. The first is the possession of an *Enduring Word*. The Gospel changes not. The Word of the Cross is as mighty after nineteen hundred years of preaching, as it was at the first. The second of these foundation-stones is the *Abiding Presence of the Spirit*. The Pentecostal Gift has never been withdrawn. The Holy Ghost is with us in all His convicting and converting power. And the third basis for our faith is the *Unchanging Christ*. He who spake with such authority when He lived among men, is speaking with the same power through His Word to-day. He who healed souls and

bodies in Galilee and Judea, will heal them in London and Birmingham, by the same blessed ministry of Saving Truth. Let us lean with more confidence on the Divine Arm. This leaning will grow into assured looking for results. Instead of surprise being expressed when souls are saved, under our ministry, we shall marvel if we do not see like results. Lowly, Listening, Loving, Leaning—we shall find our Labour cannot be “in vain in the Lord.”

V. LABOURING. There are two matters in which the preacher must put forth all the strength of heart and brain, and even of body, if he would faithfully carry out the errand of his Lord. Paul tells us of Epaphras labouring “fervently in prayer.” How searching a word is this! Does the minister of the present-day make prayer such a business as calls upon the whole strength of his manhood to be exerted? We have always regretted the testimony of a much beloved servant of God, who was called to his rest in our time, that he never spent much time in prayer, and could only remember two nights in his life’s history which he gave up to the ministry of intercessions. He could take God’s promises to Him and claim their fulfilment; there leaving the matter. But we, who are pigmies in our faith compared to him, need more time at the Mercy-seat before we are assured that we are answered. For us in this matter Dr. Alexander Whyte is the safer teacher. He says wisely, that there is more in prayer when reckoned by the ticks of the clock, than most people think. When a Welsh preacher had thrilled the souls of his hearers with a mighty discourse, he was asked where he got his sermons from. He took the questioner home, into his study, and, pointing to the carpet, said: “There, on my face, while men slept, God gave me the message.” How many of us to-day cultivate the art of labouring in prayer?

But the labouring has reference to the study and the pulpit also. Certainly to the study. When one, whose pastoral affection led him to much visitation, even in the earlier part of the day, was threatened to be locked in his study in the morning, that he might work at his books, his own daughter clapped her hands, saying, “That’s what father needs.” Too often we are satisfied with the surface meaning of a text, and do not go to the Holy Spirit, and the men whom He has taught, to help us to find the gold which lies in the mines below. We are to be “labourers together with God”; God save us from ever being shirkers in the sacred task.

If labouring is required at the Mercy-seat and in the study, it is equally requisite in the pulpit. Of that awful place it is pre-eminently true. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood,

but against principalities, against powers." We must not only put all the prayerful concentration we possess into the consideration of our message, but we must throw thought and feeling into the great task of persuading men to be reconciled to God. Spurgeon often told us that, when he had said all that words could say concerning his theme, he felt that he must "put himself into the cannon and fire himself at the congregation." He laboured for their conversion. The absence of earnest, fervent appeal for decision for Christ, and for confession of Him, is too sadly evident in the ministry of to-day. We have not to consider the tastes and wishes of our people, we have to act upon the commission of our God. "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." We must labour to bring souls to Christ.

In closing these few suggestions concerning the preacher himself, rather than his message, let me illustrate what has been written, by telling of a member of a London Baptist Church, who has made known a prayer which he daily offers. It is in these words: "Purge, Possess, Employ." If a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is so yielded to the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit that the carnal nature is kept in the state of death: if Christ has been received, not as Redeemer alone, but as Indweller also: and if the man is surrendered to be used when and how God wills, he will see results in his preaching. The prayer may take another form: "Cleanse me! Dwell in me! Use me!"

And, in conclusion, what can we do better, who desire to see souls saved through our delivery of the Saving Truth, than use the words so often sung:

Make me a channel of blessing, I pray;
Make me a channel of blessing to-day.
My life possessing, my service blessing,
Make me a channel of blessing to-day.

WILLIAM OLNEY.