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Religious.

Biblical preaching.

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What is Biblical preaching? It is not that sermonizing which is made up of Bible quotations merely. It is not speculation, philosophy, or even scientific theology. I do not mean to say that it is not these in the forms in which they come to us from the chair of the professor, for that would be nugatory; but it is not these as they are frequently set forth in the ministrations of the pulpit. The preacher stands not as the high priest of nature to interpret her laws—not as the high priest of religion to explain its philosophy—but as the ambassador of God to announce to the world his revelation. He is to proclaim God's thoughts on God's authority. Biblical preaching, then, is the reproduction of Bible truths in the Bible mode. It views all doctrines, all duties, all experiences, and all prospects from a Bible stand-point.

The obligations of the minister to the Bible far transcend those which he owes to all other branches of study. It is the centre of all literature to him. From it he derives the whole of his religion, all of his power. Even what is called natural is here revealed religion, for the Bible has incorporated and vivified it. When he is called of God, therefore, to his great work, his whole energies are pledged to its study, its explanation, its application, and its defence. He is its earthly guardian and interpreter. It is a book full of texts, on which he should found every discourse, and of tests with which to try all its parts. In the great battles of his life, here, and here only, are to be found the weapons of his warfare. As all scientific men first collect the facts from nature, and then theorize on them, so all religious dogmas and exhortations must derive their form and vitality from the Word of God.

Logic, science, philosophy, and theology have their place in preaching, but only so far as they help to explain and illustrate the Scriptures. To set forth the sublime truths of revelation in all their breadth, fulness, life, and authority, must be the constant and supreme aim of every minister of the gospel. And whatever will assist in accomplishing this object should be pressed into the service. There is no better use to which anything can be put. And certainly there is nothing that may not here be laid under tribute. But the Bible must be the centre: from it everything must start, and to it everything must point.

Why should we attempt to fasten more than Bible truths upon the minds and hearts of our hearers. There is enough here for all ministerial purposes. They alone can give life to the dead, comfort to the sorrowing, and direction to the wandering. They never fail, when properly applied, to produce sublime spiritual results; and nothing else ever succeeds. Besides, there is as much in the Bible as the mass of our auditors can well retain. We should cram to suffocation if we made the writings of the fathers, the creeds of the church, or anything more than the Bible, essential to the Christian life. Hence the reformers very wisely made the lids of the Bible the boundary lines which separated all strictly religious vital truth from all other truth. They saw what blasting effects had sprung from the introduction of any thing but the Scriptures as the foundation upon which the church should rest, or as the food upon which it must live. The Roman Catholics had made a daring attempt to improve upon the pattern of a church which God had shown them in revelation, and they had thus offered an odious and vile insult to Infinite Wisdom. They had supplemented God's declaration with the traditions of men, and so they added to themselves the plagues of the Book.

The church was restored to its original purity, life, and power, when its leaders gave themselves wholly to the study and explanation of the Word of God—when their motto was the Bible, and the Bible only, is our religion. The Bible is complete of itself, as perfect as any piece of God's workmanship. It is finished, and behold it is very good. No human hand need write an introduction to herald it to the world—no refiner need sit

over its precious metal which the great Refiner himself has already purified. All the literature of the church, whether in the form of the transient literature of sermons, or the more permanent literature of creeds, not springing naturally out of the Bible, and fully in harmony with it, is as ridiculously out of place as would be a chapter on geology in the very heart of an astronomical treatise.

The Bible is not an obsolete book. Humanity has not outlived it yet, and till the last trump shall sound it never can. Though given thousands of years ago or men differing widely from us, it meets our wants as perfectly as theirs. It was designed for the whole race in all times. Never did the infinite wisdom of Jehovah show itself more perfectly in the adaptation of means to an end than in scriptural revelations. His words are as fresh now as if they were uttered but yesterday. This constant, universal adaptation of the Bible arises from the fact that humanity is always and everywhere reproducing its religious nature. The substantial elements in society are always the same. Men may take on an endless variety of outward appearances—they may live under many forms of civilization, but in every age and nation they have the same evil passions to combat, the same oppressive sorrow to bear, and the same irrepressible longings swell their breasts. But the Bible ever furnishes a universal and unailing remedy for all earth's woes. And nothing else ever did or can. That same gospel which produced such a mighty moral transformation in Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, nearly two thousand years ago is now producing similar results throughout all Christendom.

But Biblical preaching requires not only that we should proclaim Bible truths—they must be set forth in the scriptural mode. Much always and in everything depends upon the manner. We need not be slavish imitators. There is room left for the play of the idiosyncrasies of each individual preacher. It would be wholly foreign to the spirit of the Bible not fully to sanction this liberty. How widely different are the compositions of David and Isaiah, Matthew and John, Peter and Paul. A difference in the state of the civilization of the persons addressed will also demand a difference in the style of addressing them. The costume of the Pentateuch and the Epistle to the Romans, even where the ends proposed are the same, are as diverse as are the garments of the Chinese and the French. They were intended for ages far apart, and for men whose mental aptitudes were widely different. But while these changing states in speakers and hearers necessitate an ever-varying style in our discourse, it must not be forgotten that what changes in men, his circumstances and needs, is small indeed compared with that which never changes. There is nothing that presents more strikingly diverse appearances than the human countenance, and yet in its general and most essential modes of pressing religious truth to man's spiritual nature never alter. And therefore what Chrysostom and Augustine said respecting the art of preaching is as valuable and as practical now as in any age of the church.

The French, English, Scotch, and Americans, have each very marked national characteristics, but Viner's Homiletics are useful equally to them all. And so all truly evangelical literature, let it be produced where and by whom it may, is adapted to all Christendom in all time. To the Christian world such men as Luther and Calvin can never grow old.

In a similar manner, we shall never outgrow or even improve upon the Bible method of pressing home God's truth upon the hearts and consciences of men. In a somewhat peculiar sense it is binding upon all to copy Bible manners as well as to preach Bible truths. We must, like it, be thoroughly practical, and yet profoundly spiritual; terrible as the thunders of Sinai, and yet tender and touching as the speeches of our Lord at Gethsemane and Calvary—simple as John, not even transcending the apprehensions of children, and yet so deep, dignified, and authoritative, that we shall be felt to be the voice of God. We must not so much appeal to men's reason as to their consciences—not speak as though what was ut-

tered was doubtful, requiring all the power of logic to separate the true from the false—but with such heartiness, such depth of experience and conviction that our utterances will be felt to be as immutable as the laws of the material universe. Nothing else can give birth to simple but sublime Christian faith.

In doing this, we need not be afraid of saturating our sermons with Biblical phraseology. In no other way can we so well discover to our hearers that we are God's messengers, his ambassadors, as by constantly quoting his words. Our discourses then become our credentials. This honors God—it endears the Bible to the hearts of the people and fastens its truths upon their memories.

Nor need we fear that by interweaving Bible language our discourses will lose any of their literary excellence. In no other book can we find such beauty, combined with simplicity—such depth and fulness of meaning in the same narrowness of compass—such penetrating warnings and rebukes with such sweet and cheering consolations.

Biblical preaching has many advantages to the minister himself over every other kind of sermonizing. It makes all his studies central. It raises the value of everything he touches, and renders all his acquisitions available. It perpetually elevates the standard of his piety by bringing him necessarily in daily communion with pure, heavenly truth, which leads him to view everything from God's stand-point. It affords him, too, an opportunity of preaching the most unwelcome and repulsive doctrines—such as God's sovereignty, man's depravity, and the inexcusableness of those who till death reject the offers of mercy—doctrines which many would utterly refuse to hear, were they recommended only by the logic of the preacher. Nothing but the express declarations of God can enforce them, and we shall teach them best by quoting his words.

Biblical preaching is far the most effective preaching, and it is by this test that every pulpit effort should be tried. Speculation and philosophy can never change the heart or life. Moral essays will, in every instance, be as fruitless as was the early ministry of Chalmers. Scientific theology may have the form of godliness, but, however perfect the system, it is absolutely destitute of its power. And politics, except very sparingly introduced, and that too with rare skill, will lower the dignity of the pulpit and the piety of our hearers. It will break the blessed bond which binds together Christian hearts, and create burning partisan prejudices. But the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword. It is a sword wielded by Infinite wisdom and by an Omnipotent arm. It addresses itself directly to the religious nature of man, and can neither be evaded nor resisted. It has too what nothing else has, the promise of Jehovah of a never-failing efficacy—"My word shall not return unto me void." The minister's constant business, then, is to preach the word, to hold forth the message of eternal life.

The Bible is the king of all books. It is the book amongst books, as Christ was the man amongst men. To this position it is fully entitled by the infinite superiority of its author, and by the intrinsic excellence and marvellous power of its contents. It is the great reformer in human society. It originates and directs all the mightiest changes in human history. The worst, as well as the best are under its control. The most cruel and tyrannical fulfil its prophecies. And it will continue to be so until all the inhabitants of the globe are permanently raised to its own perfect and sublime standard.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

A few words to Correspondents.

Mr. Editor,—For some weeks past there has been a discussion going on in your columns upon the subject of Sabbath Schools. One of the writers is avowedly a minister of the gospel, and his anonymous opponent is strongly suspected to be another. Such a subject in such hands we might justly suppose would be treated in a manner both interesting and in-

structive; and, that, should any difference of opinion exist, it would not lead to anything unpleasant or reprehensible. The disputants being Christian gentlemen might be considered a sufficient guarantee that they would neither degrade their subject nor forget themselves but write with a proper regard to the dignity of both. No one, who has followed the discussion in the present instance can think that the writers engaged in it are to be commended for success in this particular. It is not my intention, nor my place, to adjudicate between them and pronounce which has been the first or chief offender. In fact, I refer to them at all, only as a timely illustration of an evil to which for sometime past I have been desirous to call attention, namely, the manner in which discussions are sometimes conducted by correspondents of the Christian Messenger.

Whatever is published in the pages of your paper is read by thousands of persons and therefore, according to its nature, is adapted to do much good or evil. Writing is a talent for the employment of which its possessor is responsible and your paper affords an opportunity for its being used to much advantage. The purposes to which both the talent and the opportunity are frequently devoted by some of your correspondents, appear to me, to be of little benefit to us and less credit to them.

Not a few of these gentry are exceedingly pugnacious. They are ready at a moment's notice, and nobody's invitation to poison upon any ill-advised wight who may publish his opinion upon any earthly or heavenly subject. Their zeal is only to be equalled by their assurance. They evidently feel that they have a special gift.

"To split a hair or weigh a definition," and that their vocation is to "cut up" those whom they suppose fair game, although often better men and more useful writers than themselves. One result is that your columns are at such times burdened with discussions which should never have been commenced, but which seem as if they would never come to an end. To how many such could I point, and it is only my desire not to be personal that binds me, and challenge any one to show a good reason for the controversy, or a useful purpose promoted by it. To how many could I refer as redolent not of Christian spirit and love of the truth but of vanity and retaliation! In some instances a yet more offensive characteristic has been prominent, that of downright cant. The disputants, while speaking of each other as "dear brethren," and using much pious phraseology were evidently trying to say the bitterest things they could of each other and had entirely lost sight of the only important point at issue in their ardour to gain a worthless triumph over an opponent. In consequence of being aware of all this, some of the best minds among us may have become chary of sending communications, seeing that they do not wish to be involved in discussions that can serve no useful purpose, bring no honor, and leave only unpleasant memories. Hence you may have been deprived of valuable help and your readers of interesting and profitable articles, the substitute being, by no fault of yours, the kind of literary pabulum those pugnacious gentry furnish. Impudence will sometimes reach the sublime. I think it has done so when a person occupies three or four columns of a religious paper, intended for the Sabbath day reading of several thousands families, with quibbles and poor attempts at wit and repartee.

It is not controversy to which I am objecting—that may often be highly beneficial as well as absolutely necessary—but I am condemning disputes maintained in a quarrelsome spirit and apparently for no higher object than to gratify the egotism of the disputants who are guilty of the impertinence of intruding upon the attention of the whole denomination what is nothing more than merely personal bickering. A celebrated preacher said, that he considered the introduction into the pulpit of anything but the gospel of Christ, a grand impertinence. It would be well if all who write for your columns would regard in the same light the appearance there of anything not conducive to mental or spiritual improvement or of general interest for its own sake. PHIL.