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THE
PREACHER'S STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

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IT is the sole business of the preacher to interpret, illustrate, apply, and enforce the word of God as contained in the sacred Scriptures. He is not appointed to teach in any of the various departments of science, philosophy, secular history, or of domestic, social, and political economy. He has no call to enter the several fields of investigation described by these titles, except in so far as the special truths discoverable within them may be made serviceable for the elucidation and practical adaptation of that definite body of truth that has been revealed by the Holy Ghost. It is probable that this statement may receive assent without proofs. Never-
theless a display of the proofs may be needful to give it force, and bring it home to the conscience and heart of the preacher.

1. First of all, consider the circumstances under which the preacher exercises his functions. He appears at the head of a congregation to conduct them in the worship and service of God. In praise, he selects the forms by which they express to God their thoughts and affections. In the reading of the Scriptures he is the mouth by which God speaks to them. So far the transaction is between the people and God. Must not the sermon fall into line, and must not the preacher, therefore, be again the mouth of God to the people? Or does their communion with God end with the close of the so-called "devotional" parts of the service, and the beginning of the sermon? Is there to be a chasm here, and is the sermon the wedge that makes it? If so, then they are consistent who announce for the Sabbath, "Divine service and a sermon." But are they right?

Again, the proprieties of the occasion with
which preaching is connected preclude the privilege of inquiry, protest, or debate on the part of the people. The preacher speaks unquestioned, unanswered, by those who are responsible to God for their convictions, and also in a measure for the views and sentiments of their households assembled with them. The reiteration of the doctrines of the preacher must leave impressions on the minds even of those able and accustomed to study and discriminate for themselves, and for the most part actually determine the beliefs of those who are passively receptive. Has, then, the preacher any right to declare his ideas, opinions, notions? Is he not bound to speak from authority, and to adhere to the very text which bears the stamp of that authority? Does not the reverential attention and respectful silence of a company of worshipers put him under bonds not to speak in his own name, and declare his own word? Is it not impertinence and insolence inexcusable and unendurable in him to speak any other than the word of God?
But there are considerations still more decisive. The preacher is commissioned to stand in the behalf of God before men as sinners. He is to arraign, convince, condemn them as transgressors. How shall he dare to do this without constant appeal to authority, incessant use of the very words of him who is alone competent to declare law to the conscience, to charge with guilt, and threaten with judgment?

He is sent to offer pardon, to assure of reconciliation, to invite to repentance, and urge to reformation. But of what avail are his tenders, and pledges, and appeals if they come not direct from Him who alone can pronounce forgiveness, extend grace, and communicate power to renew and sanctify?

It is most evident here that no ministry is authorized, none can take effect, except it be a "ministry of the word."

2. Consider the end of preaching. It is twofold: the conversion of sinners, the sanctification of believers. This is the work of the Spirit. As we might infer from the
rational nature of man, and the fact of his moral freedom, the means by which the operation of the Spirit becomes effectual is the truth. Not any or all truth, but the truth; the definite sum of spiritual facts revealed in Scripture. It was the prayer of the Lord himself: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

3. Consider the precept. It was the charge of the chief apostle to the representative of all later preachers, urged by a most impressive appeal to the awful solemnities of the day of judgment: "Preach the word."

4. Consider the example. An apostle describes his preaching: "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." It may be said that the especial function of an apostle was the proclamation of truth originally from divine inspiration, and accordingly he stands so far out of the category of ordinary preachers that
he cannot be regarded as an example to them. The fallacy of this will be thoroughly exposed by simply asking the question, “Is the faith of this generation to stand ‘in the wisdom of men,’ and not ‘in the power of God?’” Why was Paul inspired to teach except that his teaching might be the word of God? And if he needed to teach that, why do not we need to teach it? Surely it is the word which is to be preached, whether it comes to us by direct or indirect inspiration.

But with lowly reverence we may consult a higher example. The very Spirit of God, the original teacher himself, presents it. Our Lord said of him, “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all *the truth: for he shall not speak of (that is, from) himself (that is, alone); but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.” As if the Holy Ghost were first a quiet listener in presence of the Father, communing with the Son, and afterward the faithful teacher of the word he had heard. And we do not stop

* See Greek text, John xvi, 13.
here. We find an example in him who was the very Word of God himself. With whatever mystery, yet with truth most exact, we must believe our Lord declared: "I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." In view of all this, what shall we say of any man who dares to stand up in God's name, before God's people, and attempt any other function than the simple interpretation of the word of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit? Let him escape the condemnation that he merits by the early and heartfelt cry, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!" Alas for the teachers in our theological schools who propagate the homiletical heresy that the oration is the proper form of the sermon, substituting the dialectics of the logicians for the order of the mind of the Spirit, and the rhetoric of the forum and the theater for the simplicity of the Gospel! Alas for the preachers who, spider-like, spin out the texture of their sermons from the substance of their own cogita-
tions, and feign in them the deceptive semblance of a divine fabric by running in here and there a thread of Scripture quotation! False prophets are they every one!

It follows, then, that the daily business of the preacher is the study of the sacred Scriptures. If an apostle could ask concerning the preachers, "How shall they preach except they be sent?" may we not add, "How shall they preach the Word except they know and understand the Word?"

We cannot comprehend how it can be otherwise than that the chief resolution of the preacher shall be that he will know his Bible, and whatever else he may have time, strength, and facility to acquire shall be known only as subsidiary to a fuller understanding of the contents of his Bible. In the accomplishment of this purpose let him then,

(1.) First of all master the history of its composition and collocation. He ought to know the genesis, object, structure, method, form of each portion, in order to understand its scope, the force of its terms, its relativity
to the minds to which it was addressed. He cannot otherwise interpret it. He ought to know and consider its place and part in a scheme of progressive revelation in order to comprehend and adjust its contribution to the sum total of revealed truth, to discriminate the temporary from the perpetual, the partial from the entire. By setting the successive revelations in the order and frame-work of history, he will get light all along the line and a focus at the end.

(2.) Let him then analyze and conceive every manifestation of God, consider and weigh every word of God, along the course of sacred history, and summon the imagination to the task of re-creating associated persons, scenes, circumstances attendant, that by this ubiquitous and timeless faculty he may become contemporaneous with the whole long chain of revelations, and become himself the recipient and the pupil. In this way only can he enter into the spirit, and conceive the meaning, and feel the power of gradually displayed truth, and prepare himself with
open and steadfast eye to take the point of view and get the outlook of evangelical prophecy toward the near and distant future.

(3.) With this advantage gained he will be ready for that inductive management of Scripture which procures the true result, which deserves the name of theology. For this is nothing but the arrangement of the facts revealed under the categories of thought. And without the previous processes it must be vicious in its procedures and false in its results. To propound a proposition as the sum of truth on a given point, and quote in confirmation at random from Genesis to Revelation, without reference to the special purpose and form of each book and its relativity to the spiritual condition and apprehension of those to whom it was first addressed, is to misuse the materials, and insure error in the conclusion.

(4.) By accepting these principles and rules the preacher will give the proper direction, sweep, and end to studies upon collateral matters. These are not to be neglected; nay!
they are to be prosecuted. But they are never to become principal. They must be followed up to that point at which they turn back again to revealed truth in the Word. If the preacher pursues further he is out of his range. This “art is long and time is fleeting.” He must get back to his main path. If he goes from the first chapter of Genesis into the realm of geology, he must hurry back; he is no geologist. If he goes forth from the ark into ethnology, he must scan the three continents and retrace his steps; he is no ethnologist. If he runs from Babel into philology, he must glance at the grammars and come home again; he is no philologist. If he parts company with the Hebrews to trace from points of contact with them the surrounding nations, he must not go too far beyond the desert, the sea, and the mountains; he is no historian. If he steps aside to decipher inscriptions on rocks, and tablets, and temples, he must not stay too long; he is no antiquarian.

(5.) And, finally, for this time, if the
preacher will trace the stream up to its fountain, he must know the tongues in which the word was given or by which it has been conveyed and preserved. The translators of the vernacular Scriptures were not inspired. The Hebrew and the Greek are the tongues of the men who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

It may not be doubted but that the people may become wise unto salvation by the study of the word in the tongue "in which they were born." But it may be confidently asserted that, if the preachers do not master the mind of the Spirit in the words of the Spirit, the people may

"Grow wiser than their teachers are,
And better know the Lord."

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