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Editorial:

Preach the Word!

Joel Portman

When Pilate asked Jesus the question, "What is truth?" in Jn. 18:38, he may have been frustrated by the variety of arguments against Jesus that had been presented in his praetorium. One can imagine his dilemma, for he knew that Jesus was innocent (that was truth), but he was being bombarded by a multiplicity of lies and deceptions that contradicted the truth he sensed within. But at the same time, he did as so many do when being assailed by contradictory statements that all purport to be the truth, he turned away from the only One who was and could give him the truth. Many in this world are also confused and baffled by the variety of claims that are made, all of which proclaim that they are speaking truth; as a result, they are left in darkness or deluded into a byway of falsehood that leads to despair.

As Christians, we know the truth, for we have experienced its liberating effect in our lives (Jn. 8:32) and it has directed us toward the One who is truth and leads us into all truth by His Spirit (Jn 16:13). It is notable that in that gospel where Pilate asked his question, "truth" is mentioned 27 times out of the 38 total in the gospels. So the truth is the One who distinctly came down from heaven, making known the Father (Jn. 1:18, 14:9) and expressing the truth of all that pertains to eternal life. And in that gospel, as well as in the others, He was communicating the truth that is essential for one to possess that divine life and thus also introducing the continuing work of the Holy Spirit that followed.

Truth is essential, not only for life in general but even more so for life that is spiritual and eternal. Faith must have a solid foundation to rest on. It must rest on truth, and truth is not truth because one thinks it is or feels it is. Truth is truth whether anyone believes it or not. Absolute truth must originate outside man's sphere because all that men teach and hold to be truth contains some variation and uncertainty. It must be truth from God, for

only He is truth and speaks the truth. Our Christian life and assurance depends on the truth that God has revealed in His Word so that the consideration of truth must bring us to what is written and endures. When Jesus encountered the devil in the wilderness temptation, He affirmed the lasting endurance of God's Word when He said, "It is written" (Mt 4:4). He used the tense that indicates that it was written, it is still written, and it always will be written. "Heaven and earth shall pass away," He said, "but my word shall never pass away" (Mt. 24:35). The truth is truth regardless of the passing of time or changes in society.

Our faith and assurance depend on the truth that God has revealed and which is confirmed to our souls by His Spirit. The believing soul affirms that God is true (Jn 3:33) and that His Word can be depended on implicitly. But while it may be accepted and believed entirely, we are also responsible to communicate it. Paul's final charge to his spiritual son, Timothy, was "Preach the Word." That is, "herald, sound out, publish and publicly proclaim the word with authority. The early days of the church were marked by men who did that; they went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4).

Preaching the Gospel

Gospel work must include personally and publicly communicating the truth to others. We do that by our testimony, witnessing, and seeking to speak to others personally as well as preaching it publicly. Both aspects are vital! Is it not possible that our personal witnessing seems to be fading? It seems that few believers today even give a tract or speak a word to others who are not saved. Increasingly (and understandably), in assembly efforts, we concentrate on the work of full-time evangelists who are not going into areas where there are no assemblies; rather, they go from assembly to assembly to do the work that local believers should be doing. We need to be careful that our gospel exercise isn't centered on formalized efforts involving extensive planning and preparation followed by nightly gospel meetings. Undoubtedly, this is an important aspect of the work of the gospel. But there needs to be the ongoing, daily efforts of exercised local believers to seek souls in their personal lives. God has, by His Spirit, equipped every assembly with all the gifts that are necessary to fulfill their responsibilities. Eph. 4:11 tells us that those gifted men have been given by the risen, ascended Christ to the church, and just as there are pastors (shepherds) and teachers, there are also evangelists. In the record in Acts, one can discern that local assemblies functioned with the aid of others such as Paul, but they also carried on those functions in dependence on the Holy

Spirit's power among them. We know of an assembly that supported seven weeks of gospel meetings with brothers from that assembly preaching each night. We don't intend to negate the work of those who labor full-time in the work. Rather, we desire to emphasize that God's intention was that local assemblies would be fully enabled to function without depending on help from others. It seems that now there is a lack of earnestness and deep exercise of soul for the salvation of the lost. More could be said, but there needs to be a revival in our souls and an awakening to realize the peril of those who lie in spiritual darkness while those who have the torch of truth pass among them without speaking to them.

There is a definite need for the public proclamation of the gospel to the lost. Not a few assemblies no longer have a designated gospel meeting on Sunday evenings. There may be a brief gospel message after the time for teaching, and many reasons might be giv-

en. One valid argument is that no one outside assembly families attends a Sunday night meeting, and we understand how difficult it is to ask them. It can be a very discouraging work! Those who seek to invite others from the area realize that it is difficult to get others to attend. But could it also be that we don't make an effort to invite them? Granted the fact that we are living in a different environment than that which formed the basis for the Sunday night gospel meeting, but are we making the effort to reach the lost personally? In a changing world, certainly it may be necessary to change methods to adjust. There isn't any Scriptural authority to maintain that we should always have a Sunday night gospel meeting using a 2-roads chart! How did they communicate the gospel earlier? Paul did most of his work, as was also the case for all of the evangelistic work in Acts, in places where people congregated, often in the marketplace (or synagogue during those early days). But we are charged to preach the gospel to every creature (Mk. 16:15) in all the world, obviously to every person. So they did so, and the commission hasn't changed, and man's need is also the same.

"Truths for our Day"

A monthly publication that is freely available on the Internet and is intended to help believers who appreciate the timeless truths of God's Word and who recognize the unchanging principles of God's will for His people. It is primarily intended to strengthen those who enjoy fellowship in local assemblies of believers who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Teaching the Truth

But local assemblies in this day of recovery, whether being the work of the Holy Spirit in Dublin, Ireland or in the NE coast of Scotland, were established on the understanding of the truth. This corresponds with the work of God when a remnant of the Jews returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and Ezra. Then they gathered to hear God's Word read and explained by those who could do so (Neh. 8:1-9). Then they responded to its teaching and obeyed what they had learned. There was a similar recovery when men in the 1800's preached the gospel faithfully to all that they could encounter and in every place that the Spirit sent them (read biographies of David Ross, David Rae, and others). The result of souls being saved was that they had to search the Word of Truth for guidance, where they discovered the truth of believer's baptism. They began to gather as assemblies because of the discovery of truth that caused them to repudiate the clerical systems of churches as well as their formalized denominational systems that existed without scriptural foundation. Truth, as found in God's Word, delivered them from clerical bondage and taught them the truth of their Christian liberty to function as holy priests in assembly fellowship.

That study of Divine truth and faithful preaching of it formed the basis of their gathering and enabled them to continue in that same pattern as they learned it from the Scriptures. And the same pattern must prevail today in order to maintain and continue the same faithful display of those principles that form the basis of local assembly fellowship. Doctrinal teaching and exposition of the Holy Word reinforce the faith and strengthen the practices of believers. For this to be

true, those who take responsibility in local assemblies must be prepared to apply themselves to study God's Word so that they might have profitable material to proclaim and explain to the believers. If there is a lack of such study and spiritual exercise, there will be a corresponding decay in the quality of the teaching that is given. That decay results in deterioration of the general spiritual character of individual believers and the entire assembly. Exhortation and encouragement from Scripture are valuable, but exhortation must be presented upon a doctrinal basis. We should ask ourselves if we are teaching the saints those things that establish a good foundation so that they can grow spiritually and be preserved from the miasma of unscriptural or heretical teachings that prevail in our world. The devil is a good teacher as well, but his aim is to undermine the foundation of our faith. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? (Ps. 11:3). It is sad when his efforts succeed and younger believers (usually) are led astray and lose their desire to remain faithful to the Word of God.

Receiving the Truth

Teaching is important, but listening and responding are also. Sometimes one who has devoted hours to study a subject in order to have a message to teach to the believers is discouraged when it seems evident that those who are listening have no appetite to learn. Some have asked, on Monday following a weekend conference, if attendees remember what was spoken. It is sad when little has been retained in their minds so that it can be put into practice in their lives. We need to develop a deep and strong love for the Word of God. Reading Ps. 119 makes us aware that the writer was a man who deeply loved God's Word. Repeatedly, he writes of his love for God's Word (the torah, giving instruction of various forms in daily living, prophetic truths, directions), God's commandments (mitsvah, directions with authority), God's testimonies (edah, His witnesses), and God's precepts (pikkood, appointed mandates, statutes). They were all precious to him and should be to us also.

The Bible is God's Holy Word, and when we read or listen to it, we should remind ourselves that this is as if God is speaking! We don't worship the Bible, but we should reverence it and respond to it with deepest affection and appreciation. We shouldn't be satisfied just to know enough to "get by". Having its truth settled deeply in our hearts and filling our souls with joy and peace comes from maintaining a positive attraction for it, almost a real, spiritual enthusiasm when we think of it or read it. How could it be a "duty" or even (sadly) "drudgery" to read this Sacred Page! Reading a portion of Scripture each day is important, but how much more valuable it is to pore over its pages and meditate on its truths. Careful reading and consideration will reap great spiritual dividends. Jack Hunter once said in words as I remember them, "It is valuable to read the Bible. It's

more valuable to read it carefully. But it's most valuable when we read it even more carefully." Those who have spent a lifetime studying God's Word find themselves amazed that they have only begun to understand its truths. We can never reach the end of knowing all that the Bible has to teach us, and if we study and meditate on it with deepest interest, it will result in holy lives that are deeply in love with the Author of such a book.

If we are too busy to spend quality time in such study and meditation, then we are too busy. Busyness is an effective tool that the devil has designed in his ambitions to thwart God's purposes in man's lives. This world (age) is effectively robbing sinners of the time that might allow the Spirit to speak to them and awaken them to their need of salvation. The available time is filled with a variety of entertainments that are geared to occupy their minds as well as their hours. This is sad to see, but it's also sad to see believers who likewise have been hindered from being occupied in the highest and most valuable activity for mortal man, and that is the study of the Word of God that satisfies the deepest longings of our souls. All of these systems have been carefully designed by God's enemy to hinder every possible purpose of God that would result in more honor to His Name and more spiritual blessing to man's soul. May it be our highest ambition to immerse ourselves in this Divine, most Blessed, Holy Book so that we might be able to feed our own souls and then to also be able to feed others who are hungering for it.

Keep close to Christ, for ministry without intimacy with Him is like machinery without fire.

F. B. Meyer

Psalm 119

J. G. Bellett

This Psalm rehearses the various virtues of the word of God, and the saints' delight and profit therein. Any believer may generally use it as the breathing of his own soul; but in its full prophetic character, it would seem that it will be the language of the true Israel on their return to God and His long neglected oracles.

When the Lord came, He found the Jews neglectful and ignorant of the Scripture. (Matt. 15:6, Matt. 22:29, John 5:38, 47) But the Remnant are directed to them. (Isa. 8:20; Mal. 4:4) And this Psalm shows their obedience to that direction, and the exercise of their heart in the divine writings. They have forsaken their own traditions and are hearing "Moses and the Prophets." (Lk. 16:29-31)

Ezra, while captive in Babylon, did, as the Remnant will do, diligently occupy himself in the word of God. (Ezra 7:6) The Berean Jews present a sample of them, likewise, in this character. (Acts 17:11) And the history of Josiah does the same. He reigned after judgment had been pronounced against Jerusalem. His repentance could not change that. Judgment was still to come; but Josiah shall (like God's Remnant) be spared. For he had set his heart to serve the Lord when all was hastening to ruin. But we have in the history this further fact — that in the midst of his doings and services, the Book of the Law is found, and that at once operates to give a new tone to all his ways. He begins with himself. He takes the place of a convicted and humbled one. In that spirit he sets himself to work again, and makes the oracles of God the rule of all his service. (2 Kings 22, 23; 2 Chr. 34, 35)

Josiah, in this way, with zeal returned to the word of God which had been so entirely lost to the nation through their idol-vanities. And so, in the latter day, the repentant Remnant will turn with listening and obedient hearts to the word of God, and treat it with special honor and regard, conscious as they will be of having so long and grievously neglected it. For such is the fruit which repentance would duly and naturally yield. It will be restitution; restoring, like Zacchaeus, fourfold to that which they had wronged.

But we cannot pass by this valuable and deeply devotional Psalm without a little further pause. From the beginning of His ways, we see God's value for His written word. He has made a hedge about it, that no rude hand can guiltlessly touch it, either to add thereto, or take therefrom. And He has bound it round the heart, before the eyes, and on the hands of His people. The gates of the field, the doors of the house, the morning and the evening family, the walk abroad and the rest within, all was to witness it. (Deut. 6, 11) It was to mingle itself with all the personal and social life of His people, and shed its light on every path, however ordinary, of their daily journey. Is it not blessed to see the Lord thus esteeming His own revelation and thus commending it to our esteem? And is it now to be erased from our gates and doors and from the palms of our hands? "The malice of Satan has raged no less against the Book than the truth contained in it." The divine life of the saint heeds it, and cannot spare any of it. It is the food of the life of faith and hope. It bears the soul to God, and keeps it near Him and with Him, through the Spirit. The more the virtues and consolations of the new life are prized, so will the word be. And the believer pleads the word or scripture as the answer to that great question, "Where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?" (Job 28:12) For He who alone knows the path of wisdom has made scripture its dwelling place. And with Him (Jer. 23:28) the saint says of all in comparison, "What is the chaff to the wheat?"

May we hold it fast, but use it skillfully in the light of the Holy Ghost in us! For if there be the error of taking away this key of knowledge (Lk. 11), so is there the error of using it with an untaught, unstable hand. (2 Pet. 3) Let us use it with the reverent and worshiping mind of the servant of God in this beautiful and most precious Psalm. Let us know something of the burnings of his heart over the holy oracles, saying, "I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for thy commandments."

"It is perilously close to being sinful for any person to learn doctrine for doctrine's sake."

Martin Lloyd-Jones

Neglect of the Bible Reading

F. W. Grant

The Bible reading meeting is a great test of the state of an assembly; for it is there, if things be right, that the knowledge, gathered in whatever way, is tested and made sure by that personal conference and comparison which help so largely in making it the realized possession of the soul. Here we may learn too, if there be the freedom and candor of brotherly love, the needs to which the truth ministers, and the ability to use it for real edification. It is of immense value to test in this way how far we have got the truth, while by this means what has been learned by each is thrown into the common fund, to enrich the whole. Those who know least would be surprised to realize how much the questions suggested by their own need may help in various ways the very people who answer them. And this is only one of the many modes in which the waterer is watered — the minister is ministered to.

The Bible reading meeting is never, therefore, made needless or of little value by whatever multiplicity there may be of more detailed and connected teaching. Nay, all this creates a special need for the reading meeting, in order that the food laid before the whole may be individually digested and assimilated. Here, however, any lack of nearness to, and confidence in, one another will be surely felt as a hindrance, and need of another sort manifested to those who have eyes to see.

"The children of this world are" indeed "wiser in their generation than the children of light," Persons brought into the inheritance together of large worldly possessions would soon realize the necessity of becoming acquainted with what they had so much personal interest in. How few are there who, in the case of

spiritual wealth which God has made their own, have boldness and earnestness to lay hold of what is theirs by any means available to them. When, over eighty years ago, the Spirit of God began to move freshly in the hearts of His people to recover them to one another, and to revive the almost lost idea of the assembly of God, the reading meetings were a marked and prominent sign of the awakened interest in His word, and that the people of God as such were awaking to claim for themselves their portion in it. No class of men could be allowed, however gifted, however educated and sanctioned by the mass, to stand between their souls and the possession of what was needed alike by all and designed by God for all. Now, alas, the decay of the reading meeting means nothing else but the subsiding of that eager enthusiasm for the truth that then was, and the lessened consciousness of the Spirit of God being in each and all His own to give each for himself the power to acquire possession. The flood-tide is gone, and the diminished stream begins to confine itself to the old channels.

We need to proclaim again that God never designed "theology" to be for a class of theologians, but all the treasures of His word to be for all His people, not a thing in it to be hidden, save from the eyes of the careless and indifferent, those who are willing to exchange their heavenly birthright for a mess of the world's pottage. We need once more to assert that teachers are only a pledge on God's part of his eagerness to have all to know, — not that He has restricted to these the possession of any kind of spiritual knowledge. Teachers are only to show that there, in the living fount from which they draw, is the living water for all, as free for others as for themselves. They are only the truth of God's word made to stand out in blazon before the eyes of those who have not yet found it there where He has put it for them, and with this for a motto of encouragement to those who have faith in a God that cannot lie, "Every one that seeketh, findeth."

The success of teachers is shown by their ability to make others independent of them when men say to them, as the Samaritans to the woman of Sychar, "Now we believe, not because of thy saying"; and in proportion as the church of God by their means is made to realize its ability for self-edification. So the apostle says that Christ has given gifts unto men, — "some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the edification of the body of Christ, until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13). That is, the "work of the ministry" — and this is left open to the largest construction — is what the saints as a whole are to be perfected unto. Every saint is free to "covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Cor. 12:31), and responsible to use all the abili-

ty he has, of whatever kind, to enrich others with it. "The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal"; and if there are special evangelists, all are free and called upon, each in his measure, to evangelize; if there are special teachers, all are free and responsible to communicate to others what God has given them of His truth. Love to each other, love to souls, is to have liberty and to be encouraged everywhere.

How blessed would be an assembly of saints in this condition, every one realizing that the fullness of all spiritual knowledge was open to him to enjoy, the best gifts were his to covet, that he was, by the simple wondrous fact of his endowment with the Spirit, the ordained minister of Christ to the world, the ordained servant and helper of his brethren. How intolerable is the thought of class restrictions to limit and hinder the grace of God in His people, yet, alas, into which, sensibly or insensibly, they so readily sink down! The development of all gift is necessarily hindered by it; and this is largely the reason why so few among us are going forth to labor in the ample fields on every side, and why the gatherings develop so little strength and stability. We need not talk about a "laity" to have one. Let God's people sink down into indolent acquiescence in their inability for their spiritual privileges, and little gift of any kind is likely to develop among them. Those that can be fed only with the spoon are infants or invalids. On the other hand, where spiritual life is strongest we shall be most fully conscious of our need of one another. For spiritual feebleness means always a strong world-element, and occupations, aims, pleasures, in which as children of God, we can have no fellowship — can be no help to one another. Our spiritual links become proportionately theoretical, formal, sentimental. But where life is practical and earnest, its needs will be felt and the grace realized which has united us together. Every one has a place to fill that no other can fill; every one is necessary. Good it is to remember this, as to ourselves and as to every other. If we forget it, we cannot by this escape from the consequences.

**We shall lose the promise if
we disregard the precept.**

Sermons

From "Lectures to My Students"

Charles Spurgeon

Sermons should have real teaching in them, and their doctrine should be solid, substantial, and abundant. We do not enter the pulpit to talk for talk's sake; we have instructions to convey important to the last degree,

and we cannot afford to utter pretty nothings. Our range of subjects is all but boundless, and we cannot, therefore, be excused if our discourses are threadbare and devoid of substance. If we speak as ambassadors for God, we need never complain of want of matter, for our message is full to overflowing. The entire gospel must be presented from the pulpit; the whole faith once delivered to the saints must be proclaimed by us. The truth as it is in Jesus must be instructively declared, so that the people may not merely hear, but know, the joyful sound. We serve not at the altar of "the unknown God," but we speak to the worshipers of him of whom it is written, "they that know thy name will put their trust in thee." To divide a sermon well may be a very useful art, but how if there is nothing to divide? A mere division maker is like an excellent carver with an empty dish before him, To be able to deliver an exordium which shall be appropriate and attractive, to be at ease in speaking with propriety during the time allotted for the discourse, and to wind up with a respectable peroration, may appear to mere religious performers to be all that is requisite; but the true minister of Christ knows that the true value of a sermon must lie, not in its fashion and manner, but in the truth which it contains. Nothing can compensate for the absence of teaching; all the rhetoric in the world is but as chaff to the wheat in contrast to the gospel of our salvation. However beautiful the sower's basket but it is a miserable mockery if it be without seed.

The grandest discourse ever delivered is an ostentatious failure if the doctrine of the grace of God be absent from it; it sweeps over men's heads like a cloud, but it distributes no rain upon the thirsty earth; and therefore the remembrance of it to souls taught wisdom by an experience of pressing need is one of disappointment, or worse. A man's style may be as fascinating as that of the authoress of whom one said, "that she should write with a crystal pen dipped in dew upon silver paper, and use for pounce the dust of a butterfly's wing"; but to an audience whose souls are in instant jeopardy, what will mere elegance be but "altogether lighter than vanity"? Horses are not to be judged by their bells or their trappings, but by limb and bone and blood; and sermons, when criticized by judicious hearers, are largely measured by the amount of gospel truth and force of gospel spirit which they contain. Brethren, weigh your sermons. Do not retail them by the yard but deal them out by the pound. Set no store by the quantity of words which you utter but strive to be esteemed for the quality of your matter. It is foolish to be lavish in words and niggardly in truth.

Rousing appeals to the affections are excellent, but if they are not backed up by instruction they are a mere flash in the pan, powder consumed and no shot sent home. Rest assured that the most fervid revivalism will wear itself out in mere smoke, if it be not maintained by the fuel of teaching. The divine method is to

put the law in the mind and then write it on the heart; the judgment is enlightened, and then the passions subdued. Read Hebrews 8:10 and follow the model of the covenant of grace. Gouge's note on that place may with fitness be quoted here: — "Ministers are herein to imitate God, and, to their best endeavor, to instruct people in the mysteries of godliness, and to teach them what to believe and practice, and then to stir them up in act and deed, to do what they are instructed to do. Their labor otherwise is like to be in vain. Neglect of this course is a main cause that men fall into many errors as they do in these days." I may add that this last remark has gained more force in our times; it is among uninstructed flocks that the wolves of popery make havoc; sound teaching is the best protection from the heresies which ravage right and left among us. Sound information upon scriptural subjects your hearers crave for and must have. Accurate explanations of Holy Scripture they are entitled to, and if you are "an interpreter, one of a thousand," a real messenger of heaven, you will yield them plenteously. Whatever else may be present, the absence of edifying, instructive truth, like the absence of flour from bread, will be fatal. Estimated by their solid contents rather than their superficial area, many sermons are very poor specimens of godly discourse. I believe the remark is too well grounded that if you attend to a lecturer on astronomy or geology, during a short course you will obtain a tolerably clear view of his system; but if you listen, not only for twelve months, but for twelve years, to the common run of preachers, you will not arrive at anything like an idea of their system of theology. If it be so, it is a grievous fault, which cannot be too much deplored. Alas! the indistinct utterances of many concerning the grandest of eternal realities, and the dimness of thought in others with regard to fundamental truths, have given too much occasion for the criticism! Brethren, if you are not theologians, you are in your pastorates just nothing at all. You may be fine rhetoricians and be rich in polished sentences; but without knowledge of the gospel, and aptness to teach it, you are but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Verbiage is too often the fig-leaf which does duty as a covering for theological ignorance. Sounding periods are offered instead of sound doctrine, and rhetorical flourishes in the place of robust thought. Such things ought not to be. The abounding of empty declamation, and the absence of food for the soul, will turn a pulpit into a box of bombast, and inspire contempt instead of reverence.

Unless we are instructive preachers, and really feed the people, we may be great quoters of elegant poetry, and mighty retailers of second-hand windbags, but we shall be like Nero of old, fiddling while Rome was burning, and sending vessels to Alexandria to fetch sand for the arena while the populace starved for want of corn. We insist upon it, that there must be abundance of matter in sermons, and next, that this matter must be congruous to the text. The discourse should

spring out of the text as a rule, and the more evidently it does so the better; but at all times, to say the least, it should have a very close relationship thereto. In the matter of spiritualizing and accommodation very large latitude is to be allowed; but liberty must not degenerate into license, and there must always be a connection, and something more than a remote connection — a real relationship between the sermon and its text. Some brethren have done with their text as soon as they have read it. Having paid all due honor to that particular passage by announcing it, they feel no necessity further to refer to it. They touch their hats, as it were, to that part of Scripture, and pass on to fresh fields and pastures new. Why do such men take a text at all? Why limit their own glorious liberty? Why make Scripture a horsing block by which to mount upon their unbridled Pegasus? Surely the words of inspiration were never meant to be boot hooks to help a Talkative to draw on his seven leagued boots in which to leap from pole to pole.

The surest way to maintain variety is to keep to the mind of the Holy Spirit in the particular passage under consideration. No two texts are exactly similar; something in the connection or drift of the passage gives to each apparently identical text a shade of difference. Keep to the Spirit's track and you will never repeat yourself or be short of matter: his paths drop fatness. A sermon, moreover, comes with far greater power to the consciences of the hearers when it is plainly the very word of God — not a lecture about the Scripture, but Scripture itself opened up and enforced. It is due to the majesty of inspiration that when you profess to be preaching from a verse you do not thrust it out of sight to make room for your own thinkings.

Brethren, if you are in the habit of keeping to the precise sense of the Scripture before you, I will further recommend you to hold to the very words of the Holy Ghost; for, although in many cases topical sermons are not only allowable, but very proper, those sermons which expound the exact words of the Holy Spirit are the most useful and the most agreeable to the major part of our congregations. They love to have the words themselves explained and expounded. Let your matter, then, be copious, and let it grow out of the inspired Word, as violets and primroses spring up naturally from the sod, or as the virgin honey drops from the comb. Take care that your deliverances are always weighty, and full of really important teaching. Build not with wood, hay, and stubble, but with gold, silver, and precious stones.

If we give our people refined truth, pure Scriptural doctrine, and all so worded as to have no needless obscurity about it, we shall be true shepherds of the Sheep, and the profiting of our people will soon be apparent. Endeavor to keep the matter of your sermonizing as fresh as you can. Do not rehearse five or six doctrines with unvarying monotony of repetition.

The word "sermon" is said to signify a thrust, and, therefore, in sermonizing it must be our aim to use the subject in hand with energy and effect, and the subject must be capable of such employment. To choose mere moral themes will be to use a wooden dagger; but the great truths of revelation are as sharp swords. Keep to doctrines which stir the conscience and the heart. Remain unwaveringly the champions of a soul-winning gospel. God's truth is adapted to man, and God's grace adapts man to it.

Of all I would wish to say this is the sum; my brethren, preach CHRIST, always and evermore. He is the whole gospel. His person, offices, and work must be our one great, all-comprehending theme. The world needs still to be told of its Savior, and of the way to reach Him.

**Especially in spiritual matters,
the heart of a matter is usually a
matter of the heart.**

The Word of God: How Do You Read It?

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

In vain would men pretend to the knowledge of God apart from the Scriptures. They have tried long and hard to attain to it by their own means, science, philosophy, etc., but only to end with this confession of their ignorance, "To the unknown God." Such was the boasted wisdom of the Greeks nothing indeed to be proud of. God can only be known by the revelation of Himself, and a revelation of Himself He has given nowhere but in the Scriptures. He has given, in creation, visible proofs of His eternal power and divinity; but these proofs, if sufficient to condemn the fool who hath said in his heart, "There is no God," do not reveal Him in His nature and character. The Scriptures only, because God-breathed, can do that. Therein alone is God manifested in His holiness, righteousness and love. "God is light" and "God is love" is what we learn and see both in His written Word and in the incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person," or, as it may be translated, "the resplendence of His glory and the imprint of His substance."

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." The Son's personal testimony is

added to the Scriptures of the Old Testament and in those of the New to make God known. If man chooses to dishonour the Son by questioning His veracity, or to dishonour God by questioning the truth of His written word, he may do so at his own cost. One thing is certain, viz., that by cleaving to his own conception of God, and of His Christ and of His word, he will never get out of darkness — inner darkness now, outer darkness later, if he persists in his present unbelief. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

Faith does not question what is God-breathed. It receives it in an honest heart, without reservation or suspicion. It sets to its seal that God is true. This is doing no more than what men usually do as regards the word of their fellows. Is God less worthy of confidence than they? Is it not in the interest of man that He has spoken? "For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then He openeth the ears of men and sealeth their instruction, that He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen, and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness: then He is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: he shall pray unto God, and He will be favourable unto him: and he shall see His face with joy: for He will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profiteth me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living." Truly the God who brings man, through trials, to feel his own sin and ruin, in order that He may tell him that He has found a ransom, and that on his honest confession He is ready to deliver his soul from going into the pit and even establish him in His favour, such a God deserves to be believed, especially when He shows us in the cross of His Son, what our redemption has cost Him.

Now, by the very acceptance of His word a man is born again born of water and of the Spirit — and the new life thus gotten has to be fed with the substance that produced it. From its very nature it can take no other food, and its development will be in proportion to the food it takes.

After nourishment, or jointly with it, will come education. Spiritual knowledge will or should go on a par with spiritual growth. "Doctrine" will come in here for profit. Doctrine consists in rightly dividing the word of truth." Failing this, a terrible mess may be made with Scripture. The amalgamation of law and grace, for instance, will lead to what is called Adventism one of the modern counterfeits of Christianity. To "rightly divide the word of truth" requires spiritual discernment, and this is given to the believer by the Holy Ghost. "He will guide you into all truth," as the Lord promised. Thus guided, and all preconception or tradition being swept aside, we discern between the several dispensations, between the earthly calling of Israel and the heavenly calling of the church.

The Old Testament is specifically for Israel, the New Testament specifically for the Christian. But it would be a fatal mistake to fancy that for Christians there is nothing to profit by in the Old Testament. If diligent, they will find on every page of it food, stay, comfort, warnings, exhortations, etc., and, when the light of the New Testament is brought to bear upon it, truth of the highest importance, especially in the way of types. When the apostle says, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that through patience and comfort of the scriptures we might have hope," he evidently refers to the scriptures of the Old Testament.

Food is as varied as possible in God's word, and this is an essential condition for a healthy state of soul. Indeed, the same principle applies to the body. No one could live long upon even the best meat prepared in one uniform way. There must be milk for the babes, and solid food for full grown men, even milk for men when, spiritually speaking, they are out of health, as were the Corinthians and the Hebrews. Nay more: of all the varieties of food contained in the scriptures there is not one sort of which the Christian can say, 'I do not require it.' How delighted, when, in reading the Old Testament, he finds out that the mind of God is continually occupied with Christ, as the types show and the prophets declare! How greatly helped by the warnings resulting from the history of the ancient people How comforted, when under trial, by the pious breathings of the Psalms! All the instructions, the warnings, the consolations, the promises, he is entitled to profit by.

And if we come to the New Testament, is there one single page that we could or would dispense with? There is great variety of food therein also. Take the Gospels: would you do with the first three of them, called The Synoptic, and set aside the Fourth? Or would you say that the Fourth is enough for you? If you leave out one of them, you suppress a part of Christ, as far as manifestation goes. If I love my Savior and Lord, I shall want to find His Messiahship — Emmanuel, God with us — as displayed in Matthew; His service as seen in Mark; His grace as unfolded in Luke; His deity united

to His perfect humanity — the Word made flesh — as witnessed to in John. I shall want to be near Him and learn of Him throughout each of them. And thus near and thus taught, I shall exclaim, "He is altogether lovely." Away with the slanderers who dare to find fault with either His words or deeds, or with the inspired testimony of those who companied with Him when He was down here and who could say, "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

Again, take the Epistles. Are they not largely varied also, and all the more profitable by reason of their variety? Thus it is that they meet the various states of soul, and conditions of walk, of those to whom they are addressed, and they are addressed now to all Christians. We could not set aside a single one of them without serious damage to our own souls. We cannot do without Galatians any more than without Ephesians. Galatians will preserve us from falling into the legalism of the present day, and Ephesians will teach us the full measure of the heavenly calling. God's truth is constituted after the same pattern as the mystic body of Christ. There is not one single part of it of which we can say, "I have no need of thee."

During their sojourn in the wilderness the children of Israel had only manna to feed upon. We Christians are far more privileged. We have manna in the Gospels — Christ the bread come down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die, — and the old corn of the land — Christ risen and glorified — in the Epistles. And the soul is in a healthy state only as it feeds on both, or rather on Him come down to die and on Him gone up in the power of an endless life. We enjoy Him inexpressibly in His path of obedience unto death here below, and on the principle of faith we enjoy by anticipation the heavenly blessings He has opened up for us.

But besides this we need instruction and direction for our daily walk, and this we have in the Scriptures as well as doctrine. Jehovah, through Moses, said to the children of Israel, "And these words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up; and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." It was not only that they might be read by such as happened to pass by, but that in the light of them these might see a life concordant therewith. It is what the world expects from the Christian, and rightly so. Where the eye is single, the body is full of light. Let it not be said, in truth, of any of those

who profess to know Christ and to keep His word, "They say, and do not."

We shall find ample "instruction in righteousness" in our Lord's sublime discourse on the Mount. Who will pretend that the Christian is above and beyond it? It is good for us to enjoy our heavenly portion, but even this may become a snare if it lead us to forget that we are called, as long as we are left down here, to be practically, and in all reality, righteous. All our ways should be in accordance with the word of God. We need, not only instructions and directions, but even commandments. It is in John's Gospel, where on the very first page we are brought into the relationship of sons, or rather of children, that the Lord speaks most of commandments. Granted that they are in keeping with the relationship; but the higher the relationship, the more strictly is obedience enjoined. Our blessed Lord Himself is the pattern of perfect obedience. Has He not said, "I have not spoken of (or, from) myself, but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak, and I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak." The very words that He was commanded by His Father to speak to His disciples became commandments from the Father to them. "If ye love me, keep my commandments," saith He, and again, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Again, "If a man love me he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Again, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

If one asks, Where am I to find them? we reply, Not on a list, but in whatever the Lord spoke and taught. This will oblige us to follow closely in His steps, but it is precisely what God expects from His children. "Hereby do we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whosoever keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked. Beloved, no new commandment write I unto you, but an old commandment, which ye had from the beginning: the old commandment is the word which ye heard. Again, a new commandment write I unto you, which thing is true in Him and in you: because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shineth."

Oh, for more relish for that word of God, for a fuller appreciation of its inestimable value! Shall we not say with Jeremiah, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by Thy name, O Jehovah God of hosts"? P.C.

The Preaching of the Gospel.

W. B. C. Beggs

When Peter preached the first Gospel sermon on the day of Pentecost three thousand souls were saved (Acts 2: 41). The fact is to be bewailed today that it may take three thousand addresses to lead to the conversion of one sinner! The unfruitfulness of present-day Gospel preaching is evident to every one, in fact it is so much in evidence, that it is essential for us to question why it is so. Only by taking stock and seeing how we stand in regard to this matter will we be able to find a remedy. It used to be that people flocked to a Gospel meeting, and that very seldom was the message preached but souls were saved. Nowadays, sad to relate, very few unsaved people attend meetings convened for them, and following upon this very few conversions are witnessed. In days not so very far distant Christians went to a Gospel meeting fully expecting results, and they were really surprised if there was not at least one trusted the Savior. Is it not the case, however, that the reverse is now true, and that we are apt to be surprised if there is a conversion follows the preaching of the message? The Gospel is God's message to men, and in no other way does He speak to unsaved souls today. Unless we really apprehend this nothing much will be achieved for Him, for it is this fact which gives authority to the Gospel. And being in itself a divine message, it follows that he who preaches it must be a divinely gifted preacher who is "a vessel meet for the Master's use" (2 Tim. 2:21).

While God does in many instances make use of natural abilities, yet we must never mistake these natural gifts for spiritual ability. There is a marked tendency in these days to teach the Gospel instead of preach it at meetings convened for the unsaved. This is a gross error, and must be well guarded against. When sinners do come to a meeting expecting to hear the Gospel preached by a servant of the Lord, they are often given a discourse without any direct appeal, which can only be understood by "those whose souls are lighted." While the Gospel must be taught to believers, yet when addressing the unsaved it must be preached! The command of the Lord Jesus was: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15), and thereby He laid a responsibility upon all His servants to make the Gospel known. The Apostle Paul realized the truth of this when he said: "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16). We would that every servant of God was burdened with this responsibility, and that they were really conscious that for the preaching of the message we have the authority of God. What an honor it surely is to declare a message from the eternal God to sinful men! Because it is God's Gospel concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 1: 1-3), we note that it is a very weighty message, and must in no way be treated lightly by any one who seeks to serve God.

In addition, surely the solemnity of the preaching of the Gospel calls for our notice. If all that was in question only applied to this present life, then the preaching of the Gospel would not be so serious, but this is not so, for men's attitude to the Christ presented in the message de-

termines their eternal destiny. O that we might have the truth burned into our being that all who reject the Gospel of Christ go down to hell! Surely this truth alone would preserve all of us from levity when preaching to sinners! Men are perishing all around us, so let all who preach the Gospel do so with a clear knowledge of the extreme importance attaching to the acceptance or rejection of Christ. Consequent on the declaring of the message sinners are faced with the choice of life or death, heaven or hell, eternal bliss or eternal woe. Let this fact be well pondered by all who serve God in this work.

The motive for all Gospel service must be love to God and love to men, in addition to which the preacher must have implicit faith in the message he declares. A preacher who is only half-convinced of the power of his message will never win souls. If actors can, on a stage, make unrealities appear real, surely we who are declaring eternal verities ought never to speak of them in such a manner as to make them appear unreal. When we preach the Gospel may God preserve all of us from being like Lot who "seemed as one that mocked" (Gen. 19:14). We must not have the slightest doubt about the power and value of Gospel preaching. Just as there must be sincerity in the service of the Gospel, so there must be simplicity of expression. All preaching of this message ought to be in such language that one who has never heard the Gospel before will be left in no doubt as to the way of salvation. "Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken?" (1 Cor. 14:9). The great elementary truths of the Gospel must be preached fearlessly and clearly, the Cross-work of the Savior being the central theme (not His death merely, but all that is entailed in His Cross). Power is essential to the fruitful preaching of the Gospel, and this is only possessed as a result of much prayer. It is of no use preaching to sinners, and looking for results, if there is not much prayer made to God for His guidance and blessing on the service. Before every Gospel meeting there ought to be a considerable time spent in prayer that sinners might be saved. Days are darkening around us, the Devil is doing all he can to hinder the work of God, and men are being led captive by him at his will; so it is surely high time that we who are the children of the day were up and doing for our Master while we still have the opportunity. There is no nobler work under heaven than of being instrumental in God's hands of leading sinners to the Savior. The time is short, the Lord will soon be here, before long the day of Gospel service will be over. Will there be any souls in heaven as a result of our labors?

It is possible to learn all about the mysteries of the Bible and never be affected by it in one's soul. Great knowledge is not enough."

John Bunyan