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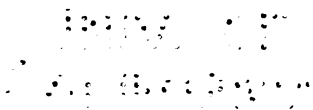
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## PREACH THE WORD.

HOWARD CROSBY.

ONE of the latest injunctions of the aged Paul, just before his martyrdom, was that to Timothy, which constitutes the text of my address—"Preach the Word." Thirty years of Christian experience, fifteen years of apostolic survey, and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, all spoke in those words. It was a command from heaven itself, not to Timothy only, but to all who fill the office of evangelists or preachers in the New Testament Church. The order, thus succinctly given, is a condensation of all that Paul had said to Timothy or to the Church on the subject of preaching. The sound or healthy doctrine on which he lays so much stress, and the avoidance of fables and the world's wisdom, are both included in this curt command. There has been a tendency from the very beginning to conform the doctrine of Christ to the philosophy of man, to fuse the two together, and to show that all religions have the same divine element at their roots. This was seen in Gnosticism, in the Alexandrian school of Clement and Origen, and in a score of heresies that sprang up within the later Church. The distinctive character of Christianity has displeased the philosophic mind, and men have sought to explain away many of its features from the stand-point of the human consciousness and by an appeal to the teachings of nature. These efforts have certain marks in common. They diminish the heinousness of sin, they exaggerate the powers of man, and they suggest a uniformity of destiny. Sin is a defect, perhaps a disease. The defect can be supplied, the disease can be cured by

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human applications, the divine help being valuable as encouragement to the human effort. High civilization and moral reform are what man needs, and these can be obtained by the use of general principles common to our race, of which Christianity is only one of the forms.

It is natural and inevitable that, with this teaching, the written Word of God should be neglected, if not ignored. No one can study that Word and then use it for so broad and indiscriminating a purpose. No one can study that Word and then be contented with a superficial polish of society, and a universal brotherhood founded on such a scheme. Paul saw this tendency in his own day, and he warns the Church earnestly against it. "Beware" is his language—"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Col. ii. 8). The evil principle is ever at work. Human nature is ever the same. The Church is always subject to the same efforts of human nature within itself to remove the foundations of grace and substitute the inventions of pride. Whether it appear in the form of hierarchical assumption, or in the character of rational inquiry and scientific research, the evil principle hides, mutilates, or contradicts the Holy Scriptures. The Scriptures, as they are, with their divine claim and their uncompromising teachings, it cannot endure, and the appeal to Scripture it counts as a mark of credulity and an exhibition of ignorance. One of the saddest sights in the Church of Christ is the yielding to this spirit of pride on the part of the ordained preachers of the Word. Many modern *Timothys* use the pulpit for discourses on art and literature, others take the opportunity for the display of rhetoric and oratory, others proclaim an ethics of expediency, while still others seek only to tickle the ears of an audience that desire to be amused. In all this you look in vain for the Gospel.

Plato or Aristotle, and in some cases Lucian, could have said it all. Churches are filled by appealing to carnal desires and æsthetic tastes. Brilliant oratory, scientific music, sensational topics, and fashionable pewholders, are the baits to lure people into the churches, and a church is called prosperous as these wretched devices succeed. The preacher delights to get himself into the newspaper, and he accommodates his preaching to the newspaper level. Such churches will, of course, have worldly-minded officers and a worldly-minded membership, while godly souls either flee from them, or else mourn in secret, if they are not themselves chilled by the lack of Gospel heat.

It is directly against all this that the holy apostle utters his clarion cry down through the ages: "Preach the Word." What is the Word? It is not man's philosophy nor man's rhetoric. It is the divine revelation. It is called the Word of God, because it is not of man. As God's, it has both authority and power—authority to demand attention, and power to convert and save the soul. It is not to be pounded in man's mortar, nor run into man's mould. It is not to be twisted and fitted to man's preconceived ideas. It is not to be filtered through man's strainer, nor mixed with man's conceits. It is God's, and *as* God's, let no man dare add *to* it, or take *from* it, or alter it in any way. The Lord Jesus stands by His cross, where He offered up the sacrifice for sin, and points backward to the Old Testament, and forward to the New, as alike the Word of God. Of the former He cries, "Search the Scriptures"; of the latter He tells His apostles that the Paraclete would come and teach them all things, and they should bear witness. This Old and New Testament is one Revelation of God—one Bible—one unerring rule of faith. God has not given us a doubtful and deceitful light for our path. He has not given us a bundle of truth and fable tied up together. He has not left us to our

weak and discordant reason, and thus made revelation superfluous. He has given His people a "sure word of prophecy" as the only reasonable guide for our weak reason and our sinful natures; and on this sure word is His Church built. The doctrines of grace have neither human origin nor human support. They are altogether divine, and are received only by the soul that becomes partaker of the divine nature. To go, therefore, to human philosophy or to man's inner consciousness for their confirmation or explanation, is to go to the sentenced criminal to understand the excellences of criminal law. The error of errors is the seeking for the truths of religion from man. It is but the adaptation of religion to the carnal heart. It is the essence of pride and rebellion against God. Thousands of tomes have been written by men who called themselves Christian scholars and Christian philosophers, which are but volumes of confusing metaphysics and specious rationalizing from the basis of natural experience, and which have undermined faith in the Word of God, and utterly perverted the Gospel of Christ. Students of Christian theology waste precious time in studying the works of these conceited thinkers, whose names are lauded as those of giants in the Church, while they are corrupting the pulpit and secularizing the pew.

It is a favorite charge of the advocates of this looseness, that we are worshipping a Book. "Bibliolatry" is the formidable word that they cast at us. But we worship no Book. We *do* worship God, who sent the Book, and it is no true worship of God that slights the Book which He gives. If we honor God, we shall honor the Word He has sent, and we shall be jealous for that Word, that not one jot or one tittle of it be disturbed by the vagaries of dreamers or the impious hands of boasting critics. It is the Word of God, and, as such, we shall not allow, for a moment, the speculations, imaginings, and guesses of men

ever so learned, to weigh a feather's weight against it. They have been convicted over and over again of grossest fallacies in their hot endeavor to detract from the influence of the Holy Word, and their criticisms have returned upon themselves to their confusion. This brief hour gives me no time to catalogue some of the absurdities which have been promulgated by these learned enemies of Revelation. Myth, romance, the fiction of poetry, a patchwork of traditions, contradictory records, pious fraud, these are some of the labels that the strutting pride of man has affixed to the books of the Bible, while not one of his sneers has been sustained in the light of honest criticism. No scientific truth has been found opposed, and no historic truth misstated, in all the sacred writings, from Moses to John. The most microscopic investigations have been made by the most eager and learned enemies of the truth, in order to find some inaccuracy, but not one has been discovered, except those necessarily resulting from the process of transcription, and those imaginary ones which are perfectly resolvable by ordinary common sense. Apply these tests to the Vedas, the Avesta, or the Koran, and the contrast is overwhelming. These fairly bristle with error and falsehood, but the Bible comes out from the crucible without spot, as the pure Word of God. Men just as learned as the inimical critics, and just as thorough in their investigation, men known and revered in the world of letters, have accepted the Bible, the whole Bible, as the inerrant truth of God. If the verdict of the inimical critics can be thus set aside in an equally learned court, the result shows that their learning goes for nothing in the matter.

But far above all this testimony to the letter is the witness of millions who have found the joy unutterable and the peace which passeth all understanding in the sacred volume, and who are drawn to it as a child is drawn to its

father without question regarding his worth and authority. They never suppose (and the position is a right one) that the fountain that refreshes their souls is defective or corrupt, but they value its every drop as a gift of the divine grace. They go constantly to its blessed waters, and always derive strength from the draught. To such the carping critics are as unworthy of regard as those who would argue against the sunshine. The knowledge of the heart is a profounder thing than the knowledge of the head, and, in the Spirit-led disciple, can correct and rebuke the errors of the latter. Now, it is this holy Word, thus spotless and thus powerful for righteousness and comfort, that the Christian preacher is to preach. The preacher is a proclaimer, a herald, not a college professor or an originator of theories. He has the Word given him, and *that* he is to proclaim. He is not to draw from the wells of human philosophy, but from the stream that flows directly from the throne of God. He is to tell the people what God has said. He is to hide himself behind his message, and to receive it equally with those he addresses. Not only is he not the inventor and expounder of a philosophy, but also he is not the mouthpiece of a church to issue ecclesiastical decrees and fulminate ecclesiastical censures. This is as far from preaching the Word as the other. As a herald of Christ, while there is nothing before him but human hearts and consciences to appeal to, there is nothing behind him but the revealed Word of God to utter and enforce. All church commands laid upon him as to his preaching are as nothing except as they are conformed to that Word. He is responsible as a herald to God and not to the church. He is God's herald and not the church's. The same reason that forbids him from making the people's approbation the guide to his preaching will forbid him from making church authority the guide. He will be happy to please both people and authorities, but he cannot make that pleas-



ing a criterion or standard. His duty is above all that. His allegiance is higher.

In thus limiting himself to the preaching of God's Word, the preacher is not circumscribing his power, but enlarging it. By the jealous use of that Word alone he will accomplish far more for the kingdom of Christ and the salvation of men than by mixing human expedients with the Word. Human expedients are very specious and attractive, and, alas! many preachers betake themselves to them. They think they will attract the multitude and fill up the pews and produce a larger rental; and so they may, but these are not the objects for which the Lord sent out His heralds. Success is not to be reckoned by full houses and popular applause, but by convicted and converted hearts, and by the strengthening of the faith and piety of God's people. A holier life, a more pronounced separation from the world, a stainless integrity in business pursuits, a Christly devotion to the interests of others, a more thorough knowledge of the Word—these are the true signs of success which the preacher may justly seek, even though he wear homespun and his people meet in a barn. These are the glorious results which the consecrated soul will pray for, and in them he will rejoice with a purer, holier joy than that which comes from numbers, wealth, or popular admiration. If the preacher preaches the Word only, then he will teach his people to handle the Word—to follow him in his reading and expounding—to study over the Scripture lesson at home, and to pray its blessed truths into their souls. A people will, in this way, become mighty in the Scriptures; and he who is mighty in the Scriptures is a mighty power for Christ and salvation, and in his own soul will have a full experience of the power of divine truth, deriving it directly from its source, and proving how the entrance of God's word giveth light.

Still again, if the preacher preach the Word only, he

will himself be a diligent student of the Word. He will bathe in God's revelation and be permeated by it, and so be proof against all the shafts of ignorance and conceit. He will become familiar with every detail of the sacred history, chronology, ethnology, geography, prophecy, precept, and doctrine, and will take nothing at second hand. He will not go to Pope or Council, nor to Calvin or Schleiermacher to know what to preach, but his delight will be in the law of the Lord, and in His law will he meditate day and night.

It is a lamentable fact, that in too many of our seminaries where preachers are prepared for their work, the Word of God is not taught, but in its stead the philosophic schemes of so-called "fathers" and great divines are given as the basis of doctrinal belief. It is true, that these schemes are brought to the Scripture for support, and texts are quoted in their defence. It is true also that some of these schemes are consonant with Scripture more or less. But, with these admissions, the mistake still exists, that the Word of God plays a secondary part in the instruction. It is not taught; that is, it is not made the authoritative text-book. It is even sometimes introduced as a subject for criticism, and men like Reuss and Robertson Smith are brought in as the critical guides or, at least, helpers. As if a school of the prophets was intended to examine the credentials of God's Word, and not to take it humbly and gratefully for personal use and for use before the people. Some theological schools might, without exaggeration, be called "schools for turning believers into doubters." The excuse, that men who are going to be preachers should know all that is said against the credibility, genuineness, and authenticity of the Scriptures, is a flimsy one. If that were the object, these objections would be considered only by way of parenthesis, and the overwhelming evidence of the Scriptures would

be the main current of thought; but this is not the way it is done. On the contrary, the objections are magnified, and their authors are commended to the students for their perusal, and the hint is often thrown out that conservative views of the inspiration of God's Word are antiquated, obsolete, and marks of ignorance. We have thus, in the very places where, most of all, we should expect to see the profoundest reverence for God's Word, and its faithful study for the understanding of the Divine will, the machinery for undermining the doctrine of Scripture inspiration and authority, on which all Christian truth rests, and that, too, in the young minds which are being prepared to become Christ's preachers to a sinful and dying world. It is a most painful thought, and it becomes the Church of Jesus Christ to arise to a sense of the evil, and to correct it before the whole Church is poisoned by this insidious influence.

We wish our young Timothys to go out to their work with the one controlling desire to put God's Word before the people and to avoid questions and strifes of words which do not minister to godly edifying, knowing that the power to convert and edify is not the wisdom of man, but the power of God.

In these days when so much is made of science, let them leave science alone. All the knowledge of the material world, which science deals in, has nothing to do with the soul's salvation. That is in a different sphere altogether. While it is in accordance with propriety that a preacher should have a general acquaintance with life and things about him, which would include the main principles of natural science (which is simply to say that he ought to be an educated man), yet it is not through material science that he is to teach heavenly truths, nor is he to waste his time on protoplasm, bathybins, and natural selection, into which and like subjects Satan would gladly draw him, that he

may not present the subjects of sin and the cross of Christ. If a preacher illustrate Scripture doctrine from facts in the natural world, it is well. He follows the Master's example. But if he puts the natural world in its scientific aspects forward as the text of his discourse, he is using a Bible of a very weak and uncertain sort, and of which he knows very little, and he is making the Word of God subordinate to his own inferences and guesses from nature. Science and Religion are too often spoken of as if they occupied the same plane. Both those who say they are antagonistic, and those who say they are at one, equally talk of the two as on a level. You might as well talk of bread-baking and religion as if they were co-ordinates. Of course there is a connection between science and religion. So there is between bread-baking and religion. The scientific man ought to be religious. So ought the bread-baker. Science can furnish examples of God's wonders in nature. So can bread-baking. But such connections cannot put the subjects on the same level. Science is merely the study of matter, an examination into natural sequences; but what has that to do with man's immortal soul, and the Word of God to that soul? Who dares to bring the latter down to the level of the former? What has the analysis of any body and its division into carbon, oxygen, and hydrogen, to do with my eternal relation to God as a responsible and sinful being? Why mingle things so utterly diverse? And yet this babble about science and religion (where science is always ever put first), is heard *ad nauseam* from those who are commissioned to preach the Word. Is this Paul's way? Is this John's way? Is this Christ's way? Then why should it be the way of our modern Timothy's? Science, at its utmost reach, can never touch the sphere of the soul's pressing wants. All its truths together can make no impression on a guilty conscience needing the divine pardon. Nature is as dumb

as any of its own stones in the matter of the soul's salvation. Then why meddle with it in the pulpit? Why bow to it as a teacher? Why be guilty of the blasphemy of putting it on a level with the Word of God?

It is as preachers depart from that Word that their preaching becomes barren and fruitless. The Divine Spirit will only accompany the Divine Word. His mighty power will act only in His own way and by His own means. The Word is supernatural, and woe to the preacher who leaves the supernatural for the natural; who sets aside the sword of the Spirit to use in its stead a blade of his own tempering!

It is a happy feature of our day, as over against the evils of which we have spoken, that God has caused His people to study the Bible as never before, and they are gathering in Sunday-schools and Bible-classes to counteract the mischief which so many pulpits are making. The faithful study of the Word will be blessed to the overthrow of the foes of the truth, and a new generation will arise strong in the Scriptures to purify the Church and rid it of its false teachers. God's truth needs no human additions. It is ample in itself to fit all the needs of the soul. One deeply versed in that truth is armed against all enemies, however formidable, however insidious. Let us do all we can to make the Bible the constant study of the Church of Christ, knowing that in this study is the safety of the Church and the hope of the world.