

## LECTURE XII. - HOW TO PREACH THE GOSPEL.

**Charles G. Finney:**

**TEXT.** --He that winneth souls is wise. --PROVERBS xi. 30.

**ONE** of the last remarks in my last lecture, was this, that the text ascribes conversion to men. Winning souls is converting men. This evening I design to show,

**I.** That several passages of Scripture ascribe conversion to men.

**II.** That this is consistent with other passages which ascribe conversion to God.

**III.** I purpose to discuss several further particulars which are deemed important, in regard to the preaching of the Gospel, and which show that great practical wisdom is necessary to win souls to Christ.

**I.** I am to show that the Bible ascribes conversion to men.

There are many passages which represent the conversion of sinners as the work of men. In Daniel, xii. 3, it is said, "And they that be wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as stars for ever and ever." Here the work is ascribed to men. So also in 1 Cor. iv. 15. "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel." Here the apostle explicitly tells the Corinthians that he made them Christians, with the Gospel or truth which he preached. Again, in James, v. 19, 20, we are taught the same thing. "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." I might quote many other passages, equally explicit. But these are sufficient abundantly to establish the fact, that the Bible does actually ascribe conversion to men.

**II.** I proceed to show that this is not inconsistent with those passages in which conversion is ascribed to God.

And here let me remark, that to my mind it often appears very strange that men should ever suppose there was an inconsistency here, or that they should ever have overlooked the plain common sense of the matter. How easy it is to see, that there is a sense in which God converts them, and another sense in which men convert them.

The Scriptures ascribe the conversion of a sinner to four different agencies--to men, to God, to the truth, and to the sinner himself. The passages which ascribe it to the truth are the largest class. That men should ever have overlooked this distinction, and should have regarded conversion as a work performed exclusively by God, is surprising. So it is that any difficulty should ever have been felt on the subject, or that people should ever have professed themselves unable to reconcile these several classes of passages.

Why, the Bible speaks on this subject, precisely as we speak on common subjects. There is a man who has been very sick. How natural it is for him to say of his physician, "That man saved my life." Does he mean to say that the physician saved his life without reference to God? Certainly not, unless he is an infidel. God made the physician, and he made the medicine too. And it never can be shown but that the agency of God is just as truly concerned in making the medicine take effect to save life, as it is in making the truth take effect to save a soul. To affirm the contrary is downright atheism. It is true then, that the physician saved him, and it is also true that God saved him. It is equally true that the medicine saved his life, and that he saved his own life by taking the medicine; for the medicine would have done no good if he had not voluntarily taken it, or yielded his body to its power.

In the conversion of a sinner, it is true that God gives the truth efficiency to turn the sinner to God. He is an active, voluntary, powerful agent in changing the mind. But he is not the only agent. The one that brings the truth to his notice is also an agent. We are apt to speak of ministers and other men as only instruments in converting sinners. This is not exactly correct. Man is something more than an instrument. Truth is the mere unconscious instrument. But man is more, he is a voluntary, responsible agent in the business. In my printed sermon, No. 1., which some of you may have seen, I have illustrated this idea by the case of an individual standing on the banks of Niagara.

"Suppose yourself to be standing on the banks of the Falls of Niagara. As you stand upon the verge of the precipice, you behold a man lost in deep reverie, approaching its verge unconscious of his danger. He

approaches nearer and nearer, until he actually lifts his foot to take the final step that shall plunge him in destruction. At this moment you lift your warning voice above the roar of the foaming waters, and cry out, Stop. The voice pierces his ear, and breaks the charm that binds him; he turns instantly upon his heel, all pale and aghast he retires, quivering, from the verge of death. He reels and almost swoons with horror; turns and walks slowly to the public house; you follow him; the manifest agitation in his countenance calls numbers around him; and on your approach, he points to you, and says, That man saved my life. Here he ascribes the work to you; and certainly there is a sense in which you had saved him. But, on being further questioned, he says, Stop! how that word rings in my ears. Oh, that was to me the word of life! Here he ascribes it to the word that aroused him, and caused him to turn. But, on conversing still further, he says, Had I not turned at that instant, I should have been a dead man. Here he speaks of it, and truly, as his own act; but directly you hear him say, Oh the mercy of God! if God had not interposed, I should have been lost. Now the only defect in this illustration is this: In the case supposed, the only interference on the part of God, was a providential one; and the only sense in which the saving of the man's life is ascribed to him, is in a providential sense. But in the conversion of a sinner, there is something more than the providence of God employed; for here not only does the providence of God so order it, that the preacher cries, Stop, but the Spirit of God urges the truth home upon him with such tremendous power as to induce him to turn."

Not only does the preacher cry, Stop, but through the living voice of the preacher, the Spirit cries, Stop. The preacher cries, "Turn ye, why will ye die." The Spirit pours the exhortation home with such power, that the sinner turns. Now in speaking of this change, it is perfectly proper to say, that the Spirit turned him, just as you would say of a man, who had persuaded another to change his mind on the subject of politics, that he had converted him, and brought him over. It is also proper to say that the truth converted him; as in a case when the political sentiments of a man were changed by a certain argument, we should say that argument brought him over. So also with perfect propriety may we ascribe the change to the living preacher, or to him who had presented the motives; just as we should say of a lawyer who had prevailed in his argument with a jury; he has got his case, he has converted the jury. It is also with the same propriety ascribed to the individual himself whose heart is changed; we should say that he had changed his mind, he has come over, he has repented. Now it is strictly true, and true in the most absolute and highest sense; the act is his own act, the turning is his own turning, while God by the truth has induced him to turn; still it is strictly true that he has turned and has done it himself. Thus you see the sense in which it is the work of God, and also the sense in which it is the sinner's own work. The Spirit of God, by the truth, influences the sinner to change, and in this sense is the efficient cause of the change. But the sinner actually changes, and is therefore himself, in the most proper sense, the author of the change. There are some who, on reading their Bibles, fasten their eyes upon those passages that ascribe the work to the Spirit of God, and seem to overlook those that ascribe it to man, and speak of it as the sinner's own act. When they have quoted Scripture to prove it is the work of God, they seem to think they have proved that it is that in which man is passive, and that it can in no sense be the work of man. Some months since a tract was written, the title of which was, "Regeneration, the effect of Divine Power." The writer goes on to prove that the work is wrought by the Spirit of God, and there stops. Now it had been just as true, just as philosophical, and just as scriptural, if he had said, that conversion was the work of man. It was easy to prove that it was the work of God, in the sense in which I have explained it. The writer, therefore, tells the truth, so far as he goes; but he has told only half the truth. For while there is a sense in which it is the work of God, as he has shown, there is also a sense in which it is the work of man, as we have just seen. The very title to this tract is a stumbling block. It tells the truth, but it does not tell the whole truth. And a tract might be written upon this proposition, that "Conversion or regeneration is the work of man;" which would be just as true, just as scriptural, and just as philosophical, as the one to which I have alluded. Thus the writer, in his zeal to recognise and honor God as concerned in this work, by leaving out the fact that a change of heart is the sinner's own act, has left the sinner strongly intrenched, with his weapons in his rebellious hands, stoutly resisting the claims of his Maker, and waiting passively for God to make him a new heart. Thus you see the consistency between the requirement of the text, and the declared fact that God is the author of the new heart. God commands you to make you a new heart, expects you to do it, and if it ever is done, you must do it.

And let me tell you, sinner, if you do not do it you will go to hell, and to all eternity you will feel that you deserved to be sent there for not having done it.

III. As proposed, I shall now advert to several important particulars growing out of this subject, as connected with preaching the Gospel, and which show that great practical wisdom is indispensable to win souls to Christ.

And FIRST, in regard to the MATTER OF PREACHING.

1. All preaching should be practical.

The proper end of all doctrine is practice. Anything brought forward as doctrine, which cannot be made use of as practical, is not preaching the Gospel. There is none of that sort of preaching in the Bible. That is all practical. "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." A vast deal of preaching in the present day, as well as in past ages, is called doctrinal, as opposed to practical preaching. The very idea of making this distinction is a device of the devil. And a more abominable device Satan himself never devised. You sometimes hear certain men tell a wonderful deal about the necessity of "indoctrinating the people." By which they mean something different from practical preaching; teaching them certain doctrines, as abstract truths, without any particular reference to practice. And I have known a minister in the midst of a revival, while surrounded with anxious sinners, leave off laboring to convert souls, for the purpose of "Indoctrinating" the young converts, for fear somebody else should indoctrinate them before him. And there the revival stops! Either his doctrine was not true, or it was not preached in the right way. To preach doctrines in an abstract way, and not in reference to practice, is absurd. God always brings in doctrine to regulate practice. To bring forward doctrinal views for any other object is not only nonsense, but it is wicked.

Some people are opposed to doctrinal preaching. If they have been used to hear doctrines preached in a cold, abstract way, no wonder they are opposed to it. They ought to be opposed to such preaching. But what can a man preach, who preaches no doctrine? If he preaches no doctrine, he preaches no gospel. And if he does not preach it in a practical way, he does not preach the Gospel. All preaching should be doctrinal, and all preaching should be practical. The very design of doctrine is to regulate practice. Any preaching that has not this tendency is not the Gospel. A loose, exhortatory style of preaching may affect the passions, and may produce excitement, but will never sufficiently instruct the people to secure sound conversions. On the other hand, preaching doctrine in an abstract manner, may fill the head with notions, but will never sanctify the heart or life.

2. Preaching should be direct. The Gospel should be preached to men, and not about them. The minister must address his hearers. He must preach to them about themselves, and not leave the impression that he is preaching to them about others. He will never do them any good, farther than he succeeds in convincing each individual that he means him. Many preachers seem very much afraid of making the impression that they mean any body in particular. They are preaching against certain sins, not that have anything to do with the sinner. It is the sin, and not the sinner, that they are rebuking; and they would by no means speak as if they supposed any of their hearers were guilty of these abominable practices. Now this is anything but preaching the Gospel. Thus did not the prophets, nor Christ, nor the apostles. Nor do those ministers do this, who are successful in winning souls to Christ.

3. Another very important thing to be regarded in preaching is, that the minister should hunt after sinners and Christians, wherever they may have intrenched themselves in inaction. It is not the design of preaching, to make men easy and quiet, but to make them ACT. It is not the design of calling in a physician to have him give opiates, and so cover up the disease and let it run on till it works death; but to search out the disease wherever it may be hidden, and to remove it. So if a professor of religion has backslidden, and is full of doubts and fears, it is not the minister's duty to quiet him in his sins, and comfort him, but to hunt him out of his errors and backslidings, and show him just where he stands, and what it is that makes him full of doubts and fears.

A minister ought to know the religious opinions of every sinner in his congregation. Indeed, a minister in the country is generally inexcusable if he does not. He has no excuse for not knowing the religious views of all his congregation, and of all that may come under his influence if he has had opportunity to know them. How otherwise can he preach to them? How can he know how to bring forth things new and old, and adapt truth to their case? How can he hunt them out unless he knows where they hide themselves? He may ring changes on a few fundamental doctrines, Repentance and Faith, and Faith and Repentance, till the day of judgment, and never make any impression on many minds. Every sinner has some hiding-place, some intrenchment where he lingers. He is in possession of some darling LIE, with which he is quieting himself. Let the minister find it out and get it away, either in the pulpit or in private, or the man will go to hell in his sins, and his blood will be found in the minister's skirts.

4. Another important thing to observe is, that a minister should dwell most on those particular points which are most needed. I will explain what I mean.

Sometimes he may find a people who have been led to place great reliance on their own resolutions. They think they can consult their own convenience, and by and by they will repent, when they get ready, without any concern about the Spirit of God. Let him take up these notions, and show that they are entirely contrary to the Scriptures. Let him show that if the Spirit of God is grieved away, however able he may be, it is certain he never will repent, and that by and by, when it shall be convenient for him to do it, he will have no inclination. The

minister who finds these errors prevailing, should expose them. He should hunt them out, and understand just how they are held, and then preach the class of truths which will show the fallacy, the folly, and the danger of these notions.

So on the other hand. He may find a people who have got such views of Election and Sovereignty, as to think they have nothing to do but to wait for the moving of the waters. Let him go right over against them, and crowd upon them their ability to obey God, and to show their obligation and duty, and press them with that until he brings them to submit and be saved. They have got behind a perverted view of these doctrines, and there is no way to drive them out of the hiding-place but to set them right on these points. Wherever a sinner is intrenched, unless you pour light upon him there, you will never move him. It is of no use to press him with those truths which he admits, however plainly they may in fact contradict his wrong notions. He supposes them to be perfectly consistent, and does not see the inconsistency, and therefore it will not move him, or bring him to repentance.

I have been informed of a minister in New England, who was settled in a congregation which had long enjoyed little else than Arminian preaching, and the congregation themselves were chiefly Arminians. Well, this minister, in his preaching, strongly insisted on the opposite points, the doctrine of election, Divine sovereignty, predestination, etc. The consequence was, as might have been expected where this was done with ability, there was a powerful revival. Some time afterwards this same minister was called to labor in another field, in this State, where the people were all on the other side, and strongly tainted with Antinomianism. They had got such perverted views of election, and Divine sovereignty, that they were continually saying they had no power to do anything, but must wait God's time. Now, what does this minister do but immediately go to preaching the doctrine of election. And when he was asked, how he could think of preaching the doctrine of election so much to that people, when it was the very thing that lulled them to a deeper slumber, he replied. "Why, that's the very class of truths by which I had such a great revival in ----;" not considering the difference in the views of the people. And if I am correctly informed, there he is to this day, preaching away at the doctrine of election, and wondering that it does not produce as powerful a revival as it did in the other place. Probably those sinners never will be converted. You must take things as they are, find out where sinners lie, and pour in truth upon them there, and **START THEM OUT** from their refuges of lies. It is of vast importance that a minister should find out where the congregation are, and preach accordingly.

I have been in many places in times of revival, and I have never been able to employ precisely the same course of preaching in one as in another. Some are intrenched behind one refuge, and some behind another. In one place, the church will need to be instructed, in another, sinners. In one place, one set of truths, in another, another set. A minister must find out where they are, and preach accordingly. I believe this is the experience of all preachers who are called to labor from field to field.

5. If a minister means to promote a revival, he should be very careful not to introduce controversy. He will grieve away the Spirit of God. In this way probably more revivals are put down, than in any other. Look back upon the history of the church from the beginning, and you will see that ministers are generally responsible for grieving away the Spirit and causing declensions by controversy. It is the ministers who bring forward controversial subjects for discussion, and by and by they get very zealous on the subject, and then get the church into a controversial spirit, and so the Spirit of God is grieved away.

If I had time to go over the history of the church from the days of the Apostles, I could show that all the controversies that have taken place, and all the great declensions in religion, too, were chargeable upon ministers. I believe the ministers of the present day are responsible for the present state of the church, and it will be seen to be true at the judgment. Who does not know that ministers have been crying out "Heresy," and "New Measures," and talking about the "Evils of Revivals," until they have got the church all in confusion? Look at the poor Presbyterian church, and see ministers getting up their Act and Testimony, and keeping up a continual war! O God, have mercy on ministers. They talk about their days of fasting and prayer, but are these the men to call on others to fast and pray? They ought to fast and pray themselves. It is time that ministers should assemble together, and fast and pray over the evil of controversy, for they have caused it. The church itself never would get into a controversial spirit unless led into it by ministers. The body of the church are always averse to controversy, and will keep out of it, only as they are dragged into it by ministers. When Christians are revived they are not inclined to meddle with controversy, either to read or hear it. But they may be told of such and such "damnable heresies," that are afloat, till they get their feelings enlisted in controversy, and then farewell to the revival. If a minister, in preaching, finds it necessary to discuss particular points, about which Christians differ in opinion, let him **BY ALL MEANS** avoid a controversial spirit and manner of doing it.[footnote-This was said with pain in 1833-34]



6. The Gospel should be preached in those proportions, that the whole Gospel may be brought before the minds of the people, and produce its proper influence. If too much stress is laid on one class of truths, the Christian character will not have its due proportions. Its symmetry will not be perfect. If that class of truths be almost exclusively dwelt upon, that requires great exertion of intellect, without being brought home to the heart and conscience, it will be found that the church will be indoctrinated in those views, will have their heads filled with notions, but will not be awake, and active, and efficient in the promotion of religion. If, on the other hand, the preaching be loose, indefinite, exhortatory, and highly impassioned, the church will be like a ship, with too much sail for her ballast. It will be in danger of being swept away by a tempest of feeling, where there is not sufficient knowledge to prevent their being carried away with every wind of doctrine. If election and sovereignty are too much preached, there will be Antinomianism in the church, and sinners will hide themselves behind the delusion that they can do nothing. If the other doctrines of ability and obligation are too prominent, they will produce Arminianism in the church, and sinners will be blustering and self-confident.

When I entered the ministry, there had been so much said about the doctrine of election and sovereignty, that I found it was the universal hiding place, both of sinners and of the church, that they could not do anything, or could not obey the Gospel. And wherever I went, I found it indispensable to demolish these refuges of lies. And a revival would in no way be produced or carried on, but by dwelling on that class of truths, which holds up man's ability, and obligation, and responsibility. This was the only class of truths that would bring sinners to submission.

It was not so in the days when President Edwards and Whitefield labored. Then the churches in New England had enjoyed little else than Arminian preaching, and were all resting in themselves and their own strength. These bold and devoted servants of God came out and declared those particular doctrines of grace, Divine sovereignty, and election, and they were greatly blessed. They did not dwell on these doctrines exclusively, but they preached them very fully. The consequence was, that because in those circumstances revivals followed from such preaching, the ministers who followed, continued to preach these doctrines almost exclusively. And they dwelt on them so long, that the church and the world got intrenched behind them, waiting for God to come and do what he required them to do, and so revivals ceased for many years.

Now, and for years past, ministers have been engaged in hunting them out from these refuges. And here it is all important for the ministers of this day to bear in mind, that if they dwell exclusively on ability and obligation, they will get their hearers back on the old Arminian ground, and then they will cease to promote revivals. Here are a body of ministers who have preached a great deal of truth, and have had great revivals, under God. Now let it be known and remarked, that the reason is, they have hunted sinners out from their hiding places. But if they continue to dwell on the same class of truths till sinners hide themselves behind their preaching, another class of truths must be preached. And then if they do not change their mode, another pall will hang over the church, until another class of ministers shall arise and hunt sinners out of those new retreats.

A right view of both classes of truths, election and free-agency, will do no hurt. They are eminently calculated to convert sinners and strengthen saints. It is a perverted view which chills the heart of the church, and closes the eyes of sinners in sleep, till they sink down to hell. If I had time I would remark on the manner in which I have sometimes heard the doctrines of Divine sovereignty, election, and ability preached. They have been exhibited in irreconcilable contradiction, the one against the other. Such exhibitions are anything but the Gospel, and are calculated to make a sinner feel anything else rather than his responsibility to God.

By preaching truth in proper proportions, I do not mean mingling all things together in the same sermon, in such a way that sinners will not see their connection or consistency. A minister once asked another, Why do you not preach the doctrine of election? Because, said the other, I find sinners here are intrenched behind inability. The first then said he once knew a minister who used to preach election in the forenoon, and repentance in the afternoon. Marvellous grace it must be, that would produce a revival under such preaching! What connection is there in this? Instead of exhibiting to the sinner his sins in the morning, and then in the afternoon calling on him to repent, he is first turned to the doctrine of election, and then commanded to repent. What is he to repent of? The doctrine of election? This is not what I mean by preaching truth in its proportion. Bringing things together, that only confound the sinner's mind, and overwhelm him with a fog of metaphysics, is not wise preaching. When talking of election, the preacher is not talking of the sinner's duty. It has no relation to the sinner's duty. Election belongs to the government of God. It is a part of the exceeding richness of the grace of God. It shows the love of God, not the duty of the sinner. And to bring election and repentance together in this way is diverting the sinner's mind away from his duty. It has been customary, in many places, for a long time, to bring the doctrine of election into every sermon. Sinners have been commanded to repent, and told that they could not repent, in the same sermon. A great deal of ingenuity has been exercised in endeavoring to reconcile a sinner's "inability" with his obligation to obey God. Election, predestination,

free-agency, inability, and duty, have all been thrown together in one promiscuous jumble. And with regard to many sermons, it has been too true, as has been objected, that ministers have preached, "You can and you can't, You shall and you sha'n't, You will and you won't, And you'll be damned if you don't."

Such a mixture of truth and error, of light and darkness, has confounded the congregation, and been the fruitful source of Universalism and every species of infidelity and error.

7. It is of great importance that the sinner should be made to feel his guilt, and not left to the impression that he is unfortunate. I think this is a very prevailing fault, particularly with printed books on the subject. They are calculated to make the sinner think more of his sorrows than of his sins, and feel that his state is rather unfortunate than criminal. Perhaps most of you have seen a very lovely little book recently published, entitled "Todd's Lectures to Children." It is very fine, exquisitely fine, and happy in some of its illustrations of truth. But it has one very serious fault. Many of its illustrations, I may say most of them, are not calculated to make a correct impression respecting the guilt of sinners, or to make them feel how much they have been to blame. This is very unfortunate. If the writer had guarded his illustrations on this point, so as to make them impress sinners with a sense of their guilt, I do not see how a child could read through that book and not be converted.

Multitudes of the books written for children, and for adults too, within the last twenty years, have run into this mistake to an alarming degree. Mrs. Sherwood's writings have this fault standing out upon almost every page. They are not calculated to make the sinner blame and condemn himself. Until you can do this, the Gospel will never take effect.

8. A prime object with the preacher must be to make present obligation felt. I have talked, I suppose, with many thousands of anxious sinners. And I have found that they had never before felt the pressure of present obligation. The impression is not commonly made by ministers in their preaching that sinners are expected to repent NOW. And if ministers suppose they make this impression, they deceive themselves. Most commonly any other impression is made upon the minds of sinners by the preacher, than that they are expected now to submit. But what sort of a gospel is this? Does God authorize such an impression? Is this according to the preaching of Jesus Christ? Does the Holy Spirit, when striving with the sinner, make the impression upon his mind that he is not expected to obey now?—Was any such impression produced by the preaching of the apostles? How does it happen that so many ministers now preach, so as in fact to make an impression on their hearers, that they are not expected to repent now? Until the sinner's conscience is reached on this subject, you preach to him in vain. And until ministers learn how to preach so as to make the right impression, the world never can be converted. Oh, to what an alarming extent does the impression now prevail among the impenitent, that they are not expected to repent now, but must wait God's time!

9. Sinners ought to be made to feel that they have something to do, and that is to repent; that it is something which no other being can do for them, neither God nor man, and something which they can do, and do now. Religion is something to do, not something to wait for. And they must do it now, or they are in danger of eternal death.

10. Ministers should never rest satisfied, until they have ANNIHILATED every excuse of sinners. The plea of "Inability" is the worst of all excuses. It slanders God so, charging him with infinite tyranny, in commanding men to do that which they have no power to do. Make the sinner see and feel that this is the very nature of his excuse. Make the sinner see that all pleas in excuse for not submitting to God, are an act of rebellion against him. Tear away the last LIE which he grasps in his hand, and make him feel that he is absolutely condemned before God.

11. Sinners should be made to feel that if they now grieve away the Spirit of God, it is very probable that they will be lost for ever. There is infinite danger of this. They should be made to understand why they are dependent on the Spirit, and that it is not because they cannot do what God commands, but because they are unwilling; but that they are so unwilling that it is just as certain they will not repent without the Holy Ghost, as if they were now in hell, or as if they were actually unable. They are so opposed and so unwilling, that they never will repent in the world, unless God sends his Holy Spirit upon them.

Show them, too, that a sinner under the Gospel, who hears the truth preached, if converted at all, is generally converted young. And if not converted while young, he is commonly given up of God. Where the truth is preached, sinners are either gospel-hardened or converted. I know some old sinners are converted, but they are rather exceptions, and by no means common.

I wish now, SECONDLY, to make a few remarks on the MANNER OF PREACHING.

1. It should be conversational. Preaching, to be understood, should be colloquial in its style. A minister must preach just as he would talk, if he wishes to be fully understood. Nothing is more calculated to make a sinner feel that religion is some mysterious thing that he cannot understand, than this mouthing, formal, lofty style of speaking, so generally employed in the pulpit. The minister ought to do as the lawyer does when he wants to make a jury understand him perfectly. He uses a style perfectly colloquial. This lofty, swelling style will do no good. The Gospel will never produce any great effects, until ministers talk to their hearers, in the pulpit, as they talk in private conversation.

2. It must be in the language of common life. Not only should it be colloquial in its style, but the words should be such as are in common use. Otherwise they will not be understood. In the New Testament you will observe that Jesus Christ invariably uses words of the most common kind. You scarcely find a word of his instructions, that any child cannot understand. The language of the gospels is the plainest, simplest, and most easily understood of any language in the world.

For a minister to neglect this principle, is wicked. Some ministers use language that is purely technical in preaching. They think to avoid the mischief by explaining the meaning fully at the outset; but this will not answer. It will not effect the object in making the people understand what he means. If he uses a word that is not in common use, and that people do not understand, his explanation may be very full, but the difficulty is that people will forget his explanations and then his words are all Greek to them. Or if he uses a word in common use, but employs it in an uncommon sense, giving his special explanations, it is no better; for the people will soon forget his special explanations, and then the impression actually conveyed to their minds will be according to their common understanding of the word. And thus he will never convey the right idea to his congregation. It is amazing how many men of thinking minds there are in congregations, who do not understand the most common technical expressions employed by ministers, such as regeneration, sanctification, etc.

Use words that can be perfectly understood. Do not, for fear of appearing unlearned, use language half Latin and half Greek, which the people do not understand. The apostle says the man is a barbarian, who uses language that the people do not understand. And "if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?" In the apostles' days there were some preachers, who were marvellously proud of displaying their command of language, and showing off the variety of tongues they could speak, which the common people could not understand. The apostle rebukes this spirit sharply, and says, "I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."

I have sometimes heard ministers preach, even when there was a revival, when I have wondered what that part of the congregation would do, who had no dictionary. So many phrases were brought in, manifestly to adorn the discourse, rather than to instruct the people, that I have felt as if I wanted to tell the man, "Sit down, and not confound the people's minds with your barbarian preaching, that they cannot understand."

3. Preaching should be parabolical. That is, illustrations should be constantly used, drawn from incidents, real or supposed. Jesus Christ constantly illustrated his instructions in this way. He would either advance a principle and then illustrate it by a parable, that is, a short story of some event real or imaginary, or else he would bring out the principle in the parable. There are millions of facts that can be used to advantage, and yet very few ministers dare to use them, for fear somebody will reproach them. "Oh," says somebody, "he tells stories." Tells stories! Why, that is the way Jesus Christ preached. And it is the only way to preach. Facts, real or supposed, should be used to show the truth. Truths not illustrated, are generally just as well calculated to convert sinners as a mathematical demonstration. Is it always to be so? Shall it always be matter of reproach, that ministers follow the example of Jesus Christ, in illustrating truths by facts? Let them do it, and let fools reproach them as story-telling ministers. They have Jesus Christ and common sense on their side.

4. The illustrations should be drawn from common life, and the common business of society. I once heard a minister illustrate his ideas by the manner in which merchants transact business in their stores. Another minister who was present made some remarks to him afterwards. He objected to this illustration particularly, because, he said, it was too familiar, and was letting down the dignity of the pulpit. He said all illustrations in preaching should be drawn from ancient history, or from some elevated source, that would keep up the dignity of the pulpit. Dignity indeed! Just the language of the devil. He rejoices in it. Why, the object of an illustration is, to make people see the truth, not to bolster up pulpit dignity. A minister whose heart is in the work, does not use an illustration to make people stare, but to make them see the truth. If he brought forward his illustrations from ancient history, it could not make the people see, it would not illustrate anything. The novelty of the thing

might awaken their attention, but then they would lose the truth itself. For if the illustration itself be a novelty, the attention will be directed to this fact as a matter of history, and the truth itself, which it was designed to illustrate, will be lost sight of. The illustration should, if possible, be a matter of common occurrence, and the more common the occurrence the more sure it will be, not to fix attention upon itself, but it serves as a medium through which the truth is conveyed. I have been pained at the very heart, at hearing illustrations drawn from ancient history, of which not one in a hundred of the congregation had ever heard. The very manner in which they were adverted to, was strongly tinctured, to say the least, with the appearance of vanity, and an attempt to surprise the people with an exhibition of learning.

The Saviour always illustrated his instructions by things that were taking place among the people to whom he preached, and with which their minds were familiar. He descended often very far below what is now supposed to be essential to support the dignity of the pulpit. He talked about the hens and chickens, and children in market-places, and sheep and lambs, shepherds and farmers, and husbandmen and merchants. And when he talked about kings, as in the marriage of the king's son, and the nobleman that went into a far country to receive a kingdom, he had reference to historical facts, that were well known among the people at the time. The illustration should always be drawn from things so common that the illustration itself will not attract attention away from the subject, but that people may see through it the truth illustrated.

5. Preaching should be repetitious. If a minister wishes to preach with effect, he must not be afraid of repeating whatever he sees is not perfectly understood by his hearers. Here is the evil of using notes. The preacher preaches right along just as he has it written down, and cannot observe whether he is understood or not. If he interrupts his reading, and attempts to catch the countenances of his audience, and to explain where he sees they do not understand, he gets lost and confused, and gives it up. If a minister has his eyes on\* the people he is preaching to, he can commonly tell by their looks whether they understand him. And if he sees they do not understand any particular point, let him stop and illustrate it. If they do not understand one illustration, let him give another, and make it all clear to their minds, before he goes on. But those who write their sermons go right on, in a regular consecutive train, just as in any essay or a book, and do not repeat their thoughts till the audience fully comprehend them.

I was conversing with one of the first advocates in this country. He said the difficulty which preachers find in making themselves understood, is, that they do not repeat enough. Says he, "In addressing a jury, I always expect that whatever I wish to impress upon their minds, I shall have to repeat at least twice, and often I repeat it three or four times, and even as many times as there are jurymen before me. Otherwise, I do not carry their minds along with me, so that they can feel the force of what comes afterwards." If a jury under oath, called to decide on the common affairs of this world, cannot apprehend an argument unless there is so much repetition, how is it to be expected that men will understand the preaching of the Gospel without it.

In like manner the minister ought to turn an important thought over and over before his audience, till even the children understand it perfectly. Do not say that so much repetition will create disgust in cultivated minds. It will not disgust. This is not what disgusts thinking men. They are not weary of the efforts a minister makes to be understood. The fact is, the more simple a preacher's illustrations are, and the more plain he makes everything, the more men of mind are interested. I know that men of the first minds often get ideas they never had before, from illustrations which were designed to bring the Gospel down to the comprehension of a child. Such men are commonly so occupied with the affairs of this world, that they do not think much on the subject of religion, and they therefore need the plainest preaching, and they will like it.

6. A minister should always feel deeply his subject, and then he will suit the action to the word and the word to the action, so as to make the full impression which the truth is calculated to make. He should be in solemn earnest in what he says. I heard lately a most judicious criticism on this subject. "How important it is that a minister should feel what he says. Then his actions will of course correspond to his words. If he undertakes to make gestures, his arms may go like a windmill, and yet make no impression." It requires the utmost stretch of art on the stage for the actors to make their hearers feel. The design of elocution is to teach this skill. But if a man feels his subject fully, he will naturally do it. He will naturally do the very thing that elocution laboriously teaches. See any common man in the streets, who is earnest in talking. See with what force he gestures. See a woman or a child in earnest. How natural. To gesture with their hands is as natural as it is to move their tongue and lips. It is the perfection of eloquence.

Let a minister, then, only feel what he says, and not be tied to his notes, to read an essay, or to speak a piece, like a school-boy, first on one foot and then on the other, put out first one hand and then the other. Let him speak as he feels, and act as he feels, and he will be eloquent.



No wonder that a great deal of preaching produces so little effect. Gestures are of more importance than is generally supposed. Mere words will never express the full meaning of the Gospel. The manner of saying it is almost everything. Suppose one of you, that is a mother, goes home to-night, and as soon as you get into the door, the nurse comes rushing up to you, with her whole soul in her countenance, and tells you that your child is burnt to death. You would believe it, and you would feel it too, at once. But suppose she comes and tells it in a cold and careless manner. Would that arouse you? No. It is the earnestness of her manner, and the distress of her looks, that tells the story. You know something is the matter, before she speaks a word.

I once heard a remark made, respecting a young minister's preaching, which was instructive. He was uneducated, in the common sense of the term, but well educated to win souls. It was said of him, "The manner in which he comes in, and sits in the pulpit, and rises to speak, is a sermon of itself. It shows that he has something to say that is important and solemn." That man's manner of saying some things I have known to move the feelings of a whole congregation, when the same things said in a prosing way would have produced no effect at all.

A fact which was stated by one of the most distinguished professors of elocution in the United States, ought to impress ministers on this subject, That man was an infidel. He said, "I have been fourteen years employed in teaching elocution to ministers, and I know they do not believe the Christian religion. The Bible may be true. I do not pretend to know as to that, but I know these ministers do not believe it. I can demonstrate that they do not. The perfection of my art is to teach them to speak naturally on this subject. I go to their studies, and converse with them, and they speak eloquently. I say to them, Gentlemen, if you will preach just as you yourselves naturally speak on any other subject in which you are interested, you do not need to be taught. That is just what I am trying to teach you. I hear you talk on other subjects with admirable force and eloquence. I see you go into the pulpit, and you speak and act as if you did not believe what you are saying. I have told them, again and again, to talk in the pulpit as they naturally talk to me. And I cannot make them do it, and so I know they do not believe the Christian religion."

I have mentioned this to show how universal it is, that men will gesture right if they feel right. The only thing in the way of ministers being natural speakers is, that they do not DEEPLY FEEL. How can they be natural in elocution, when they do not feel?

7. A minister should aim to convert his congregation. But you will ask, Does not all preaching aim at this? No. A minister always has some aim in preaching, but most sermons were never aimed at converting sinners. And if sinners were converted under them, the preacher himself would be amazed. I once heard a fact on this point. There were two young ministers who had entered the ministry at the same time. One of them had great success in converting sinners, the other none. The latter inquired of the other, one day, what was the reason of this difference. "Why," replied the other, "the reason is, that I aim at a different end from you, in preaching. My object is to convert sinners, but you aim at no such thing. And then you go and lay it to sovereignty in God, that you do not produce the same effect, when you never aim at it. Here, take one of my sermons, and preach it to your people, and see what the effect will be." The man did so, and preached the sermon, and it did produce effect. He was frightened when sinners began to weep; and when one came to him after meeting to ask what he should do, the minister apologized to him, and said, "I did not aim to wound you, I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings." Oh, horrible!

8. A minister must anticipate the objections of sinners, and answer them. What does the lawyer do when pleading before a jury? Oh, how differently is the cause of Jesus Christ pleaded from human causes! It was remarked by a lawyer, that the cause of Jesus Christ had the fewest able advocates of any cause in the world. And I partly believe it. Does a lawyer go along in his argument in a regular train, and not explain any thing obscure, or anticipate the arguments of his antagonist? If he did so, he would lose his case to a certainty. But, no. The lawyer, who is pleading for money, anticipates every objection, which may be made by his antagonist, and carefully removes or explains them, so as to leave the ground all clear as he goes along, that the jury may be settled on every point. But ministers often leave one difficulty and another untouched. Sinners who hear them feel the difficulty, and it is never got over in their minds, and they never know how to remove it, and perhaps the minister never takes the trouble to know that such difficulties exist, and yet he wonders why his congregation is not converted, and why there is no revival. How can he wonder at it, when he has never hunted up the difficulties and objections that sinners feel, and removed them?

9. If a minister means to preach the Gospel with effect he must be sure not to be monotonous. If he preaches in a monotonous way, he will preach the people to sleep. Any monotonous sound, great or small, if continued, disposes people to sleep. The falls of Niagara, the roaring of the ocean, or any sound ever so great or small, has this effect naturally on the nervous system. You never hear this monotonous manner from people in

conversation. And a minister cannot be monotonous in preaching, if he feels what he says.

10. A minister should address the feelings enough to secure attention, and then deal with the conscience, and probe to the quick. Appeals to the feelings alone will never convert sinners. If the preacher deals too much in these, he may get up an excitement, and have wave after wave of feeling flow over the congregation, and people may be carried away as with a flood, and rest in false hopes. The only way to secure sound conversions is to deal faithfully with the conscience. If attention flags at any time, appeal to the feelings again, and rouse it up; but do your work with conscience.

11. If he can, it is desirable that a minister should learn the effect of one sermon, before he preaches another. Let him learn if it is understood, if it has produced any impression, if any difficulties are felt in regard to the subject which need clearing up, if any objections are raised, and the like. When he knows it all, then he knows what to preach next, What would be thought of the physician who should give medicine to his patient, and then give it again and again, without trying to learn the effect of the first, or whether it had produced any effect or not? A minister never will be able to deal with sinners as he ought, till he can find out whether his instruction has been received and understood, and whether the difficulties in sinners' minds are cleared away, and their path open to the Saviour, so that they need not stumble and stumble till their souls are lost.

I had designed to notice several other points, but time does not admit. I wish to close with a few

#### REMARKS.

1. We see why so few of the leading minds in many communities are converted.

Until the late revivals, professional men were rarely reached by preaching, and they were almost all infidels at heart. People almost understood the Bible to warrant the idea, that they could not be converted. The reason is obvious. The Gospel had not been commended to the consciences of such men. Ministers had not grappled with mind, and reasoned so as to make that class of mind see the truth of the Gospel, and feel its power, and consequently such persons had come to regard religion as something unworthy their notice.

But of late years the case is altered, and in some places there have been more of this class of persons converted, in proportion to their numbers, than of any others. That is because they were made to understand the claims of the Gospel. The preacher grappled with their minds, and showed them the reasonableness of religion. And when this is done, it is found that that class of minds are more easily converted than any other. They have so much better capacity to receive an argument, and are so much more in the habit of yielding to the force of reason, that as soon as the Gospel gets a fair hold of their minds, it breaks them right down, and melts them at the feet of Christ.

2. Before the Gospel can take general effect, we must have a class of extempore preachers, for the following reasons:

(1.) No set of men can stand the labor of writing sermons and doing all the preaching which will be requisite.

(2.) Written preaching is not calculated to produce the requisite effect. Such preaching does not present truth in the right shape.

(3.) It is impossible for a man who writes his sermons to arrange his matter, and turn and choose his thoughts, so as to produce the same effect as when he addresses the people directly, and makes them feel that he means them. Writing sermons had its origin in times of political difficulty. The practice was unknown in the apostles' days. No doubt written sermons have done a great deal of good, but they can never give to the Gospel its great power. Perhaps many ministers have been so long trained in the use of notes, that they had better not throw them away. Perhaps they would make bad work without them. The difficulty would not be for the want of mind, but from wrong training. The bad habit is begun with the school boy, who is called to "speak his piece." Instead of being set to express his own thoughts and feelings in his own language, and with his own natural manner, such as nature herself prompts, he is made to commit another person's writing to memory, and then mouths it out in a stiff and formal way. And so when he goes to college, and to the seminary, instead of being trained to extempore speaking, he is set to writing his piece, and commit it to memory. I would pursue the opposite course from the beginning. I would give him a subject, and let him first think, and then speak his thoughts. Perhaps he will make mistakes. Very well, that is to be expected--in a beginner. But he will learn. Suppose he is not eloquent, at first. Very well, he can improve. And he is in the very way to improve. This kind of training alone will ever raise up a class of ministers who can convert the world.

But it is objected to extemporaneous preaching, that if ministers do not write, they will not think. This objection will have weight with those men whose habit has always been to write down their thoughts. But to a man of a different habit, it will have no weight at all. Writing is not thinking. And if I should judge from many of the written sermons I have heard preached, the makers of them had been doing anything rather than thinking. The mechanical labor of writing is really a hinderance[sic.] to close and rapid thought. It is true that some extempore preachers have not been men of thought. And so it is true that many men who write sermons, are not men of thought. A man whose habits have always been such, that he has thought only when he has put his mind on the end of his pen, will of course, if he lays aside his pen, at first find it difficult to think; and if he attempts to preach without writing, will, until his habits are thoroughly changed, find it difficult to throw into his sermons the same amount of thought, as if he conformed to his old habits of writing. But it should be remembered that this is only on account of his having been trained to write, and having always habituated himself to it. It is the training and habit that renders it so difficult for him to think without writing. Will any body pretend to say that lawyers are not men of thought? That their arguments before a court and jury, are not profound and well digested? And yet every one knows that they do not write their speeches. It should be understood, too, that in college, they have the same training with ministers, and have the same disadvantage of having been trained to write their thoughts; and it is only after they enter upon their profession, that they change their habit. Were they educated, as they should be, to extempore habits in the schools, they would be vastly more eloquent and powerful in argument than they are.

I have heard much of this objection to extempore preaching ever since I entered the ministry. It was often said to me then, in answer to my views of extempore preaching, that ministers who preached extemporaneously, would not instruct the churches, that there would be a great deal of sameness in their preaching, and they would soon become insipid and repetitious for want of thought. But every year's experience has ripened the conviction on my mind, that the reverse of this objection is true. The man who writes least may, if he pleases, think most, and will say what he does think in a manner that will be better understood than if it were written; and that, just in the proportion that he lays aside the labor of writing, his body will be left free to exercise, and his mind to vigorous and consecutive thought.

The great reason why it is supposed that extempore preachers more frequently repeat the same thoughts in their preaching, is because what they say is, in a general way, more perfectly remembered by the congregation, than if it had been read. I have often known preachers, who could repeat their written sermons once in a few months, without its being recognised by the congregation. But the manner in which extempore sermons are generally delivered is so much more impressive, that the thoughts cannot in general be soon repeated, without being remembered. We shall never have a set of men in our halls of legislation, in our courts of justice, and in our pulpits, that are powerful and overwhelming speakers, and can carry the world before them, till our system of education teaches them to think, closely, rapidly, consecutively, and till all their habits of speaking in the schools are extemporaneous. The very style of communicating thought, in what is commonly called a good style of writing, is not calculated to leave a deep impression on the mind, or to communicate thought in a clear and impressive manner. It is not laconic, direct, pertinent. It is not the language of nature. It is impossible that gestures should be suited to the common style of writing. And consequently, when they attempt to gesture in reading an essay, or delivering a written sermon, their gestures are a burlesque upon all public speaking.

In delivering a sermon in this essay style of writing, it is impossible that nearly all the fire of meaning and power of gesture, and looks, and attitude, and emphasis should not be lost. We can never have the full meaning of the Gospel, till we throw away our notes.

### 3. A minister's course of study and training for his work should be exclusively theological.

I mean just as I say. I am not now going to discuss the question whether all education ought not to be theological. But I say education for the ministry should be exclusively so. But you will ask, Should not a minister understand science? I would answer, Yes, the more the better. I would that ministers might understand all science. But it should all be in connection with theology. Studying science is studying the works of God. And studying theology is studying God.

Let a scholar be asked, for instance, this question: "Is there a God?" To answer it, let him ransack the universe, let him go out into every department of science, to find the proofs of design, and in this way to learn the existence of God. Let him next inquire how many gods there are, and let him again ransack creation to see whether there is such a unity of design as evinces that there is one God. In like manner, let him inquire concerning the attributes of God, and his character. He will learn science here, but will learn it as a part of theology. Let him search every field of knowledge, to bring forward his proofs. What was the design of this plan? What was the end of that arrangement? See whether everything you find in the universe is not calculated

to produce happiness, unless perverted.

Would the student's heart get hard and cold in study, as cold and hard as the college walls, if science was pursued in this way? Every lesson brings him right up before God, and is in fact communion with God, and warms his heart, and makes him more pious, more solemn, more holy. The very distinction between classical and theological study is a curse to the church, and a curse to the world. The student spends four years in college at classical studies, and no God in them, and then three years in the seminary, at theological studies; and what then? Poor young man. Set him to work, and you will find that he is not educated for the ministry at all. The church groans under his preaching, because he does not preach with unction, nor with power. He has been spoiled in training.

4. We learn what is revival preaching. All ministers should be revival ministers, and all preaching should be revival preaching; that is, it should be calculated to promote holiness. People say, "It is very well to have some men in the church, who are revival preachers, and who can go about and promote revivals; but then you must have others to indoctrinate the church." Strange! Do they not know that a revival indoctrinates the church faster than anything else! And a minister will never produce a revival, if he does not indoctrinate his hearers. The preaching I have described, is full of doctrine, but it is doctrine to be practised. And that is revival preaching.

5. There are two objections sometimes brought against the kind of preaching which I have recommended.

(1.) That it is letting down the dignity of the pulpit to preach in this colloquial, lawyer-like style. They are shocked at it. But it is only on account of its novelty, and not for any impropriety there is in the thing itself. I heard a remark made by a leading layman in the centre of this State, in regard to the preaching of a certain minister. He said it was the first preaching he ever heard, that he understood, and the first minister he ever heard that spoke as if he believed his own doctrine, or meant what he said. And when he first heard him preach as if he was saying something that he meant, he thought he was crazy. But eventually, he was made to see that it was all true, and he submitted to the truth, as the power of God for the salvation of his soul.

What is the dignity of the pulpit? To see a minister go into the pulpit to sustain its dignity! Alas, alas! During my foreign tour, I heard an English missionary preach exactly in that way. I believe he was a good man, and out of the pulpit he would talk like a man that meant what he said. But no sooner was he in the pulpit, than he appeared like a perfect automaton--swelling, mouthing, and singing, enough to put all the people to sleep. And the difficulty seemed to be, that he wanted to maintain the dignity of the pulpit.

(2.) It is objected that this preaching is theatrical. The bishop of London once asked Garrick, the celebrated play-actor, why it was that actors, in representing a mere fiction, should move an assembly, even to tears, while ministers, in representing the most solemn realities, could scarcely obtain a hearing. The philosophical Garrick well replied, "It is because we represent fiction as reality, and you represent reality as a fiction." This is telling the whole story. Now what is the design of the actor in a theatrical representation? It is so to throw himself into the spirit and meaning of the writer, as to adopt his sentiments, make them his own, feel them, embody them, throw them out upon the audience as living reality. And now, what is the objection to all this in preaching? The actor suits the action to the word, and the word to the action. His looks, his hands, his attitudes, and everything are designed to express the full meaning of the writer. Now this should be the aim of the preacher. And if by "theatrical" be meant the strongest possible representation of the sentiments expressed, then the more theatrical a sermon is, the better. And if ministers are too stiff, and the people too fastidious, to learn even from an actor, or from the stage, the best method of swaying mind, of enforcing sentiment, and diffusing the warmth of burning thought over a congregation, then they must go on with their prosing, and reading, and sanctimonious starch. But let them remember, that while they are thus turning away and decrying the art of the actor, and attempting to support "the dignity of the pulpit," the theatres can be thronged every night. The common-sense people will be enterta