

## LECTURE II.

### *THE PREACHER'S COMMISSION.*

SACRED RHETORIC is one branch of eloquence. It is of prime importance that the student should apprehend, first, what eloquence truly is, and, second, what is the difference between the secular department of it and ours. Eloquence is often named as one of the fine arts, but, as I have already forewarned you, there is an essential distinction made by the ends of the two. Music and the imitative arts are designed, primarily, to gratify the taste. Their immediate aim is at the sentimental affections of the soul. But the immediate end of eloquence is to produce in the hearer some practical volition. Its design is to evoke an act. When this is said, you will not understand me as indicating by the word action only the movement of the body and its members. I speak of the actions of the soul, of those matured determinations of the will in which man's rational and responsible activity consummates itself. And, I repeat, that wherever there is no direct purpose in the speaker to educe action of will in his hearers there is no proper oration.<sup>1</sup> True, the oration

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Aristotle (b. I., ch. 3) incorrectly classes orations under three *genera*: of the Statesman, of the Advocate, and of the Eulogist. The object of the first is always to cause the election or rejection of a given course of action. That of the second is to pro-

may, while it determines the soul to action, produce as a collateral effect much excitement of taste. But if it elevates this subordinate result into the place of its chief design, it has degenerated into a spurious poem without metre. So, a poem, and especially a lyric like the *Marseillaise Hymn*, may be addressed to the will, but in this it ceases to be mere poetry, and becomes a true metrical oration. The essay is directed to still another object, the elucidation and establishment of truth to the reason. It aims to propagate only opinion and not action.

Let me now recall your doctrines of ethics and psychology, so far as to gain the answer to this question, How is the soul determined to volition? You know that it is not by the sensibility alone, nor by the logical discernment alone. Volition is not a conclusion of any separate faculty of the soul, but of the soul itself, involving all its powers, whether active or passive, whether of cognition, sensibility or desire. The previous states of soul which have to volition the relation of cause to immediate effect are always complex, being both processes of intellection and appetency. Whence, it is manifest, eloquence deals with the hearer's soul through all its powers. But it is far more important to say that eloquence operates through all the powers of the speaker's soul likewise. Not only must the ora-

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cure a verdict of acquittal or condemnation. That of the third, not so obviously active, is really so, for it aims to gain a moral verdict by which the hearer adopts the subject as his approved model of virtue. Aristotle knew nothing of our nobler department, that of evangelical eloquence. We may more clearly decide of this, that its end is always action of soul in the hearer, repentance, faith, or some other duty.

tor's reason perform the processes of perception and logic, his heart must be powerfully actuated by those processes of emotion which he seeks to propagate, his taste must thrill with those affections of sentiment which he would make ancillary to his main effect, and his will must go forth vehemently to that act to which he would decide the hearer. The last assertion is perhaps the most important of the four just made. For the power of the orator over his hearer is far more than intellectual, it is more than sentimental, it projects the force of his volition through these other powers upon the will of his hearer. And there is a sympathy of soul between man and his fellows, by which each power of the one operates upon the corresponding powers of the others; not, of course, without the *medium* of cognition, yet with its own proper force. Especially is this true of the will. How often do we see men swayed by the mere strength of a vigorous will in another beyond the legitimate influence of his logic?

I would, then, define eloquence as *the emission of the soul's energy through speech*. This view of its nature, as you perceive, justifies the judgment, that it is one of the finest exercises of the human faculties.

But that it may be worthy of the name of eloquence, it must have one more trait: the purpose of propagating in the soul a volition morally excellent. If you have understood my definitions and explanations, you are convinced that the powers of soul employed by the orator are even more the moral than the intellectual. If, therefore, he wrests these, which are the peculiar domain of conscience, to resist conscience, he is guilty of the most glaring perversion of the art. His spurious

is related to the true eloquence, as vice is related to virtue. For when man perpetrates a wicked act, he exercises the active powers of the soul, desire and choice, which put themselves forth in the right act. The whole difference is in their opposite direction to a vicious instead of a virtuous end. Artifices of persuasion, skillfully used to cause one to will amiss, have no more claim to be true eloquence, because they are similar to the means of the proper art, than evil volitions have to be considered virtuous energy, because they are also exercises of man's spontaneity. I urge, moreover, that all vice is a weakness of his nature. The perverted activities of the soul are depraved in energy as well as in moral quality. Hence, the man of wicked ends will never exhibit the same power of soul, with the righteous man of the same native force. But the crowning reason is, that conscience herself is the mightiest power in man, and the moral affections are not only the purest but the most profound of all. The speaker, whose end is to persuade men to violate their conscience, is therefore not only enfeebled in the main forces of his own nature; but he must act without, yea against, those forces in the souls he would move. Thus I trace the true rhetorical power to its source in a noble purpose. There must be clear intellection, vivid sensibility, ardent emotion, vehement will; but chiefest of all, must be the virtuous end. Well did Theremin speak in propounding as his theorem, "Eloquence is a virtue."

Having found true eloquence to be the soul's virtuous energy exerted through speech, I would remind you that the sermon is a peculiar species of eloquence. Like all other eloquence, it aims always to produce a

definite, practical volition in the hearer. This aim is, in the best sense, a worthy one; for the acts it evokes are the spiritual. But its peculiarity is chiefly this, that it applies to the will, the authority of God, the only Lord of the conscience. This alone, I repeat, makes the gospel discourse. Other orators bring to bear upon the understandings of their hearers the force of human testimony and natural reason; they apply to their hearts legitimate secular and moral inducements. The preacher relies alone upon evangelical inducements, and refers every conviction of the reason ultimately to God's testimony. I elaborate this all-important distinction carefully; perhaps my reasons for it are difficult to grasp, because of their simplicity. The end, I repeat, of every oration is *to make men do*. But the things which the sermon would make men do, are only the things of God. Therefore it must apply to them the authority of God. If your discourse urges the hearer merely with excellent reasons and inducements, natural, ethical, social, legal, political, self-interested, philanthropic, if it does not end by bringing their wills under the direct grasp of a "thus saith the Lord," it is not a sermon; it has degenerated into a speech.<sup>1</sup>

Were it necessary, young gentlemen, I would even beseech you to master these definitions of what eloquence is, and of what the sermon is. Fix them firmly in your minds, as the foundations of successful study in this course. As we proceed, you will meet many confirmations of their justice, and I trust that when we are done, you will think with me of them. One great dif-

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 13.

faculty of the young preacher is caused by confusion of thought, upon the precise nature and aim of the sermon. Such was the testimony of Dr. Baxter's experience. If the true conception of preaching is that high and sacred one which I have presented, how inexpressibly does he enervate its proper force, who confounds it with the moral oration!

The last subject of remark has introduced us to the fundamental question, What is the preacher's scriptural position and warrant? You will perceive a necessary connection between my theory here, and the theological system of the Protestant churches. It is our doctrine that "the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants." We eschew all "will-worship" as forbidden and mischievous. We admit no title to do anything as a part of the public, religious service of God, except those things which He hath appointed in his word. Hence, unless we can find such warrant for preaching, as an instituted part of divine service, we dare not introduce it. We hold likewise that "unto this catholic visible Church, Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world."<sup>1</sup> It is also the creed of Protestants, as of the Bible, that this book is "all given by inspiration of God," and is our divine and supreme rule of faith and life. "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary . . . for man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto

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<sup>1</sup> Conf. of Faith, ch. xxv. § 3.

which nothing at any time is to be added.”<sup>1</sup> But this word is only made effectual to the calling and sanctification of any rational adults, by the almighty inworking of God’s Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

For the warrant, then, of our office as preachers, we point first to the example and precedent of the scriptural Church—teachers of both Testaments, and especially to the apostolic. This precedent, being set, and uniformly imitated, by divine authority, is to us of the force of a command. Next, we point to the express precepts of our Saviour; “As ye go, preach;”<sup>3</sup> and of the Apostle: “Preach the word; be instant, in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.”<sup>4</sup>

The nature of the preacher’s work is determined by the word employed to describe it by the Holy Ghost. The preacher is a herald;<sup>5</sup> his work is heralding the King’s message. Once, the apostles call themselves Christ’s ambassadors; but of old, ambassadors were no other than heralds. Now the herald does not invent his message; he merely transmits and explains it. It is not his to criticise its wisdom or fitness; this belongs to his sovereign alone. On the one hand, he does not carry it as a mere implement of sound, a trumpet or a drum; he is an intelligent *medium* of communication with the king’s enemies; he has brains as well as a tongue; and he is expected so to deliver and explain his master’s mind, that the other party shall receive not only the mechanical sounds, but the true meaning of the

<sup>1</sup> Conf. of Faith, ch. i. §§ 2, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., ch. x.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. x. 7; Luke x. 1; Acts x. 42.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 2; iv. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Κηρυξ, κηρυσσειν, passim. Ὑπερ Χριστου πρεσβευομεν. 2 Cor. v. 20.

message. On the other hand, it wholly transcends his office to presume to correct the tenour of the propositions he conveys, by either additions or change. These are the words of God's commission to an ancient preacher: "Arise; go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee."

The preacher's task may be correctly explained as that of (instrumentally) forming the image of Christ upon the souls of men. The plastic substance is the human heart. The die which is provided for the workman is the revealed Word; and the impression to be formed is the divine image of knowledge and true holiness. God, who made the soul, and therefore knows it, made the die. He obviously knew best how to shape it, in order to produce the imprint he desired. Now the workman's business is not to criticise, recarve, or erase anything in the die which was committed to him; but simply to press it down faithfully upon the substance to be impressed, observing the conditions of the work assigned him in his instructions. In this view, how plain is it, that preaching should be simply representative of Bible truths, and in Bible proportions! The preacher's business is to take what is given him in the Scriptures, as it is given to him, and to endeavour to imprint it on the souls of men. All else is God's work. The die is just such, so large, so sharp, so hard, and has just such an "image and superscription" on it, as God would have. Thus He judged, in giving it to us. With this, "the man of God is perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."<sup>1</sup> This is enough for us.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 17.

Here we have plain truths which no evangelical believer will dare dispute. But if I am not mistaken, they contain deductions adverse to some things in the practice of professed Protestant ministers. For instance, not only must Bible topics form the whole matter of our preaching, but they must be presented in scriptural aspects and proportions. The Bible was made to be the food of the people; it is not a raw material which the religious philosopher is to digest into new forms before they can assimilate it. This book is not like that of creation, a mixed mass of the ore of knowledge, which must be reduced by science before it can be applied to the uses of life. It is the great principle of Protestants that the Bible is for the people. And this implies that God, who knew best, has not only set forth such truths, but in such proportions and relations as really suit man's soul under the dealings of the Holy Spirit. There can be no other connections and forms of the truth so suitable as these, for these are they which God has seen fit to give. We may be guilty then of infidelity to our task, though we be not heterodox. We may preach only truths, and yet from an overweening temper make some truths relatively more prominent and others more retired than the Bible does. Our preaching must in this regard be conformed to the "proportion of faith."<sup>1</sup>

But there are many who shrink with fear from what they regard as so confined a walk of ministerial instruction. They think it necessary to take a more ample range in preaching than simply showing the people

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. xii. 6.

what the Bible means, and imprinting that meaning on their souls. The secret feeling is: "This would not allow variety and interest enough. There would not be verge enough for the preacher to display his own powers. This is a business too simple and plodding for your profound theological philosopher. There is not mental *pabulum* enough for the intellects of enlightened hearers." So, in some pulpits, we have grandiloquent expositions of the "moral system of the universe." In others the Sabbaths of the people are wholly occupied with those polemics by which the outworks of Christianity should be defended against the foreign assaults of infidel philosophy; as though one would feed the flock within the fold with the bristling missiles which should have been hurled against the wolves without. Others deal in scholastic discussions of the propositions of church-symbols, cleaving the "bare bones of their orthodoxy" into splinters as angular and dry as the gravel of the desert. Others again offer metaphysical discussions of the psychology of religion, as though they would feed the babes of Christ with a sort of chemical resolution of the sincere milk of the Word into its ultimate elements, instead of the living, concrete nourishment provided for them by their Saviour. Now what is this but the very spirit of unbelief and self-seeking? The selection of such forms of truth is evidently not guided by the lowly, self-devoted spirit of the "servant" of the Church, but by a single eye to self-display. God puts the "sword of the Spirit" into this man's hand, and tells him that with this he shall conquer. He distrusts it, he will add something more trenchant. God tells him that the "Word is quick and

powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."<sup>1</sup> "No," says the unbelieving servant, "I can devise truths more piercing." These, my brethren, are not the men to do the work of that God who "hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." Theirs is the spirit of infidelity, and their preaching breeds infidelity.

I have explained to you what the true end of the sermon is, what eloquence is, and by what means the orator reaches that end. I wish you to infer hence this most momentous of all conclusions, that the prime qualification of the sacred orator is sincere, eminent piety. Consider: nothing is an oration which does not directly move the hearer to act. The main action urged in every sermon is to believe and be saved. Eloquence we saw is the emission through speech of all the soul's virtuous energies, of thought, of sensibility, and especially of will. Now, unless the preacher's will is ardently directed toward this end, the salvation of the hearer, the main element of his power is lacking. But what is this direction of the will, save love for souls? And this is pre-eminently the spirit of Christ.

The scriptural doctrine of the preacher's mission and warrant also decides at once against an abuse of the pulpit, to which the clergy have always been prone. It may be named with sufficient accuracy by the popular phrase, "political preaching." Romanists hold a theory

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<sup>1</sup> Heb. iv. 12.

of church power which if correct, would legitimate the practice. Although it is inconsistent with the principles of Protestants, they have since the Reformation been frequently seduced into it by a sophism. The prevalence of this error requires, therefore, that we consider it in this connection. Its tendency has always been, whether among Romanists or Protestants, to degrade the position and character of the clergy, to embitter party spirit, to provoke bloodshed, and to corrupt the hearts of the hearers. The reasons of these results are not difficult to find.

It was remarked (in substance) by Burke, that when parsons meddle publicly with state affairs they usually show nothing of the politician but his rancour. This charge is true. It is explained in part by the fact that clergymen are accustomed to deference and unused to contradiction, and in part, by their habit of urging the opinions they espouse from a conscientious point of view. They become accustomed to sanctifying their creeds in their own eyes, and regarding their quarrel as God's. Thus their very animosities become holy in their view.

The appropriate mission of the minister is to preach the gospel for the salvation of souls. The servant who by diverging into some other project not especially enjoined on him, nor essential for him to perform, precludes himself from his allotted task, is clearly guilty of disobedience to his master, if not of treason to his charge. Now, questions of politics must ever divide the minds of men; for they are not decided by any recognized standards of truth, but by the competitions of interest and passion. Hence, it is inevitable that he

who embarks publicly in the discussion of these questions, must become the object of party animosities and obnoxious to those whom he opposes. How then can he successfully approach them as the messenger of redemption? By thus transcending his proper functions, he criminally prejudices his appointed work with half the community, for the whole of which he should affectionately labour.

God has reserved for our spiritual concerns one day from seven, and has appointed one place into which nothing shall enter, except the things of eternity, and has ordained an order of officers, whose sole charge is to remind their fellow-men of their duty to God. Surely, it is a tribute small enough to pay the transcendent weight of eternal things, to reserve the season and the place sacredly to them, which God has set apart for them. This surely is not too much for resisting the tendencies of man toward the sensuous and toward forgetfulness of the spiritual life. But when the world sees a portion or the whole of this sacred season abstracted from spiritual concerns, and given to secular agitations, and that by the appointed guardians of sacred things, it is the most emphatic possible disclosure of unbelief. It says to men, "Eternity is not of more moment than time; heaven is not better than earth; a man is profited if he gains the world and loses his soul, for do you not see that we postpone eternity to time, and heaven to earth, and redemption to political triumph—we who are the professed guardians of the former?" One great source, therefore, of political preaching may always be found in the practical unbelief of the preacher himself; as one of its sure fruits is

infidelity among the people. He is not feeling the worth of souls, nor the "powers of the world to come," nor "the constraining love of Christ" as he should; if he were, no sense of the temporal importance of his favorite political measures, however urgent, would cause the wish to abstract an hour from the few allowed him for saving souls. We solemnly protest to every minister who feels the impulse to introduce the secular into his pulpit, that he thereby betrays a decadent faith and spiritual life in his own breast. Let him take care! He is taking the first steps toward backsliding, apostasy, damnation.

Another motive which prompts ministers of the Gospel to preach politics is usually to be thus explained: The topics of redemption are dry and repulsive to the great world; and especially, when the public mind is absorbed by agitating questions of social interest. Hence, the minister's self-love and vanity feel the itching to enjoy some of the *éclat* of the exciting discussion; to see his ideas reflected from the faces of sympathizing crowds, and to hear the applause of approving supporters. This, to the carnal mind, is much more attractive and easy, than the holy, but difficult task, of recalling the hearts jaded and debauched by the engrossing passions of the world, to peaceful and heavenly themes. If the political preacher will candidly examine his own breast, he will surely detect this unworthy and pitiful motive, under his zeal for social reform.

This abuse of the pulpit tends directly to produce in the hearers, uncharitableness, spiritual pride, censoriousness, animosity, contempt of opponents, and violence, instead of humility, penitence, holy love, and holy liv-

ing. Your political parson is only such, when he has an approving party to address; and usually it is the majority in his own charge. This is accounted for by the remarks just made. Moreover, when he sets out on his crusade of social reform, it is always against the sins or errors of some people to whom his approving clique are opposed, that he bears his Pythonic testimony. To be eloquent against the social heresies or crimes of his own party would not exactly answer the purposes of his self-love. Thus, the amount of his Sunday-ministrations is to invite the hearts of his hearers to the consideration of their neighbours' sins and not their own. On the contrary, everything tends to suggest their own superior virtue and orthodoxy. Their vain glory is pleasantly stimulated by the comparison; and their hearts gratified with the luxury of self-righteous hatred and carping, instead of being summoned to those irksome, impertinent, old-fashioned exercises, self-examination and repentance. Whereas the Gospel insulates each sinner, directs his eyes within, to his own sins, reminds him of his own solemn responsibility, calls him to contrition and self-reformation, and ever says to him, "Thou art the man," this religion of party strife diverts men's eyes from their own faults, (by sorrowing for which their hearts might be made better,) to the faults of others, by gloating over which they become full of all uncharitableness, pride, and hatred. Thus, the result of such a perversion of the pulpit is, uniformly, an outburst of corruption in the bosom of the nominal Christianity which is cursed by it. The tendency of the human heart is ever to the worse; there is no wonder that when the appointed restraints of Gos-

pel truth are withdrawn, and this ministration of pride and spite is applied at the same time, the progress in depravity should be frightfully rapid. Witness the effect on public morals of the preaching of the crusades against the Albigenses, of the Romish clergy in France during the *Ligue*, of the Puritans in England against the Royalists, of the radical clergy of this country against the Union and the Constitution.

Weak defences of this abuse have been attempted. It is asked, "Is not the minister also a citizen?" The answer is: "He is a citizen only at the hustings, and on a secular day. In the pulpit he is only the ambassador of Christ." It is urged again, that Peter, Paul, and the Lord Jesus Christ, taught political duties. We reply: Would that these pests of modern Christianity had truly imitated them; had taken not only their texts, but their discourses from them, instead of deriving the latter from the newspapers. Let them do as the sacred writers do: teach the duties of allegiance from the Christian side and motive only, "that the word of God and his Gospel be not blasphemed." Another plea is, that Christianity is designed to produce important collateral results on the social order of nations; as that social order reacts on Christianity. The answer is twofold: that these secular results are the minor, the eternal redemption of souls is the chief end of God in his Gospel. He is a criminal servant who wilfully sacrifices the less to the greater. Second, the only innocent way (as the most efficient) in which the minister of religion can further these secular results, is so to preach each man's own sins and redemption to him as to make him personally a holy man. When society is thus pur-

ified, by cleansing the integral individuals who compose it, then, and then only, will the social corruptions of commonwealths be effectually purged away.

If the example of Christ and his apostles were correctly weighed, it would be a sufficient guide to all other ministers. They lived in a time of intense party agitation. The Jewish commonwealth was then divided by a question, the most momentous that could fire the heart of a nation—whether their divinely-ordained constitution was compatible with their subjugation by a Pagan empire? This question was everywhere hotly debated; it was rapidly growing into that war which a generation later brought the end of the Hebrew commonwealth. We know that neither Jesus nor Paul was insensible to patriotism. The former wept over the approaching ruin of his country; the latter declared himself ready to die for his compatriots; yet, such is their reserve on the question in their religious teachings, that the unlearned reader of the New Testament is left in actual ignorance of its existence, except that once it is forced upon our Saviour's attention by a direct inquiry. And then so small does this great secular interest appear beside the eternal errand which he came to subserve, he devotes only a part of one sentence to the former, reverting even before he ends it to the more absorbing concerns of the soul.<sup>1</sup> Let his ministers imitate him.

The experience of the Church sustains this plea for the exclusive preaching of redemption. The pomps of a liturgical drama may attract occasional crowds to

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxii. 16-21.

the cathedral of the ritualist. Party rage may for a time cause the multitude to throng the steps of the clerical demagogue; yet the permanent hold upon the popular mind and heart is possessed by the evangelical preacher. Sooner or later, the mere moralist, the Socinian, the political preacher, the philosophizer, the choir of ghostly pantomimists, are all seen performing to empty benches, while from age to age the multitude of Christians surrounds those who preach "Christ and him crucified." May not even we perceive a reason for this? The conceit and self-love of the natural mind persuade the would-be pulpit philosopher that his newly-coined ideas are wondrously attractive, because they are the bantlings of his own invention. Perhaps he is not fully aware of his own motive, but it is his intellectual vanity which selects them as his clerical hobbies. Now he forgets a very simple fact, that his hearers have toward these favourite topics not a particle of his pride of paternity. They are thoroughly conscious that they did not beget them; that they are the preacher's only. Hence he is perpetually disappointed by finding that he cannot sustain the enthusiasm of the people for his favourite topics. He never wearies of them; his hearers do. But God's topics, the fall, the curse, sin, death, immortality, duty, redemption, faith, hope, judgment, hell, heaven, these transcendent subjects have an abiding, an overmastering common interest. All men share it, because they are men. These assert their power over the human soul under every condition, and in spite of man's natural carnality, with a force akin to their vastness. Honour God then, my young brethren, by urging no other truths than those

he has given you, urging them with disinterested fidelity, and he will honour your ministry.

In conclusion, few words are needed to show that this peculiar mission of the preacher will dictate a method of its own which will differ from that of the secular orator. It will communicate a peculiar earnestness, tenderness and authority. Its influence will extend to the structure, the style, the utterance and the gesture, making all more serious, more paternal, more elevated than they are in him who pleads the affairs of earth.