



WGT Shedd on Powerful Preaching

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the course of teaching, preaching and pastoral labours I have found myself returning again and again to William G.T. Shedd's little volume on *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology* for help and insight. It has proved a never failing source of inspiration to me, and want to share with you some of the things that I have found so helpful particularly as they relate to the subject of effective, or powerful preaching.

There is another reason for wanting to do this as well. For many years I have had a deep longing to see a revival of powerful preaching in the church. By powerful preaching, I mean preaching that has spiritual force and impact - preaching that compels attention and produces lasting effects. Of that, I fear, we suffer a great lack. In recent years there has been something of a restoration of biblical preaching, and for that we can all thank God. But if we are honest about our own ministries, and those of our colleagues whom we love and respect, we have to admit that there is still little of what we might call spiritually impressive preaching about today. Preaching that makes a lasting and powerful impression upon the spiritual lives of men and women. One can hear accurate preaching, solid preaching, substantial preaching, logical preaching. But where is the preaching that raises men and women to the throne of God, and humbles them to the dust; that grips them and stirs them, compels and transforms them? Unless I am completely ignorant of the true situation, I have to conclude that there is precious little of it about - at least in my own country, and certainly in my own ministry. I want to know why this is so. I want to know if this is simply a matter of the sovereignty of the Spirit, or if there are human causes for which we are accountable. And it is in search of an answer to these questions that I have found Shedd so helpful.



## **WGT Shedd on Powerful Preaching**

William Greenough Thayer Shedd lived in a very different generation to ours. He was born in the year 1820 in Acton, Massachusetts, into a culture, which had; for one thing, a far greater appreciation of classical elements in education than ours does today. Students, not simply in seminaries, but in schools and colleges studied such subjects as Latin, logic, rhetoric and moral philosophy - subjects which many of us had no contact with in our own educational courses. This instilled into those of a more academic caliber anyway, a great appreciation of such mental skills as analysis, arrangement, order and unity. You cannot read the sermons and writings of the great preachers of this age without being impressed by the force of their minds and of their entire characters. They were men of substantial mental and spiritual power. And that showed when they spoke. They had tremendous effect upon those who heard them. T.C. Johnson tells us, for example, that some of Dabney's students were at times so overcome by the power of his preaching that they couldn't concentrate on their studies for periods of up to six weeks after hearing him.

It is particularly this mental and spiritual force, this deep impressiveness of the manner and speech of men like Shedd, Dabney, Thornwell and Benjamin Palmer that interests me so deeply. I know that these men were uncommon men who were special gifts to the church of Christ and that they are not to be viewed as the norm of their day or ours. But at the same time, their greatness was not all a matter of sheer genius. They were great teachers and preachers because they were men of great method and discipline. Added to that, they were men of great personal faith and godliness. The two things; discipline and godliness were, as we shall see, very much intertwined in their lives and ministries. Their industry and earnestness were but necessary expressions of their inner religious force; the natural emission of their spiritual energies. At the same time, their diligence and studiousness fed and nurtured the flame of piety within them. There was no tension between prayer and study, the one infused the other with its life and light, and gave birth to men of great mental vigour and strength of spirit.



I want then; to try to enter into the very soul of a man like Shedd, to drink as it were of his very spirit, if I may put it like that. What did he consider were the vital ingredients of a ministry of great spiritual power and influence? In his view, how do men become preachers of great power? I want to suggest to you that Shedd, were he alive to tell us, would probably direct our attention to three matters. He would say the **first thing** he would tell us that we have to consider the man himself behind the preaching. **Secondly**, we have got to turn our minds to the source of powerful preaching, where it finds its roots and origins. And then **thirdly**, he would insist that we consider the form appropriate to powerful preaching. That, is how I propose to lead you into a fresh look at his thinking and counsel to us

## **Part 1: The man behind powerful preaching**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Our concern is to understand more about powerful preaching, specifically to understand how we can become more powerful preachers. There will of course, always be an element of mystery about this. Spiritual power is not under our control. "The wind blows wherever it pleases," Jesus told Nicodemus, "you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.(John 3:8)." We recognize the absolute sovereignty of the Spirit in this matter of powerful preaching. He is able to take the humblest and feeblest of preachers and use them out of all proportion to their theological and literary gifts. He is Lord in this matter, and we are not evangelical shamanists pretending we can manipulate his Being.

At the same time, we recognize that ordinarily the Holy Spirit works through means adapted to his purposes. We also recognize there are certain means more adapted to his use than others and from that point of view, we believe it's our duty to do everything in our power to become the best-fitted instruments we possibly can for His use.



Further in our discussion our interest will be taken up with *what* we preach and the *way* in which we preach it. That is with the content and the form of our sermons. We need to ask if this is the only point at which there is an 'adaptation between means and ends,' or if there are other factors as well that can influence a preacher's usefulness. In particular, we need to ask if there is anything about the manner of a preacher's life that fit's him or unfits him to be a messenger of God. Is there any correlation between the preacher's personal and spiritual character, and the power with which he preaches the Word?

William G.T. Shedd, our mentor in these studies, is as emphatically clear upon this point as he is upon matters of formal rhetoric. Yes, he would insist, the man behind the sermon who is the means of the message does matter. After all, the classicist in him argues, a discourse be it secular or sacred;

*".... is not so much the product of the man, as it is the man himself - the embodiment of all his faculties and all his processes." p. 41*

He is simply saying that you cannot separate the man from the message. While the man is not the message, his humanity is mingled with it and leaves its mark upon it. The state of mind, heart and soul of the preacher diffuses its quality through what he says, and either serves to chill or to vivify its message. Consistency between the message and the messenger is of the utmost importance in powerful preaching!

What qualities in the preacher himself, then, are vital to powerful preaching? Three emerge again and again in Shedd's writing- ***spirituality, discipline*** and ***intensity***.

## **I. SPIRITUALITY**

Spirituality, like the term beauty, is one that is somewhat out of favour in contemporary Christian circles. It smacks of an elitist pietism that people want to distance themselves from. We are happy to be known as committed Christians, diligent Bible students, powerful preachers, and eminently



practical and relevant Christians. But we don't court the reputation of being spiritual Christians. That sounds too puritanical, and nobody wants to be that pious.

Shedd, on the other hand, ranks spirituality among the first requirements of an effective preacher. By that term, he has nothing airy in view, but a very sane and biblical notion. For him, spirituality is a matter of being taken up with realities in the spiritual realm. It is

*"That solemn and serious mental frame which is naturally and constantly occupied with eternal realities." p. 108*

It means to be at home in a realm of thought and life that concerns the unseen. It means to love and enjoy above all things communion with God, to dwell upon the glory of the risen Lord, to ponder the mystery of the Spirit's power, to agonize over the lostness of men, and to live in hope of the world to come.

*"Some Christians" he says, "seem to be much more at home in the invisible realm of religion than others. They are characterized by a uniformly earnest and unearthly temper, as if their eye were fixed upon something beyond the horizon of this world, as if they saw more, and farther, than thoughtless and unspiritual men about them. Their eye is fixed upon something beyond time and sense, and they do see more, far more of the 'things unseen and eternal,' than the average of Christians." p. 108-9*

Unless a preacher is of this bent, Shedd would argue, he could never be a truly powerful preacher. He is doomed to speak to others of matters of which he is a personal stranger. When he preaches, he trades as it were in a foreign currency, one he neither understands nor appreciates, and consequently, one he can never commend with the earnestness that he should. He might be a practical man, a caring man, an efficient man, and even a learned man. But he will never be a powerful man as long as his heart



and soul are not most at home with heavenly things. The powerful preacher is one who, to use his words, speaks

*" as an eyewitness of eternal realities. He speaks convincingly, because he knows what he says, and whereof he affirms." p. 109*

How does one cultivate this kind of spirituality? We are drawn back, once more, to Shedd's favourite theme. The Christian man, and especially the Christian pastor, will find his spiritual life deepened only as he immerses himself in the study of the Bible and of useful books. Shedd is a firm believer in the importance of thinking and study in the nurture of a preacher's spiritual life. He has a great wariness of experiential Christianity that is severed from revelation and intelligent understanding. Commenting on the value of catechizing youth he says,

*"Experimental religion, without doctrinal knowledge, must deteriorate. Religious feeling will become more superficial, religious zeal more insincere and religious action more fitful and selfish, if the mind of the church is not obtaining clear and self-existent conceptions of religious truth. A dead orthodoxy is an evil, and so is an ignorant pietism. But there is no necessity for either. Feeling and cognition are not antagonistic, but exist together in the most perfect Being. And only as they coexist in the renewed mind is there the highest type of Christian life." p. 356-7*

There you have his philosophy stated perfectly. We must have experiential Christianity; there is no other sort worthy of the name. But it must be an experiential Christianity founded upon and nourished by a careful, insightful and prayerful study of the truth. To that end, preachers in particular must devote themselves. They must read and study above all things for their own benefit. There must be no rift between the hard discipline of thinking and devotion. The two belong together.

*"Those who unduly magnify the practical to the undervaluation of the doctrinal and theoretic in theology, are wont to make the objection, that study is unfavourable to devotion. There cannot be a more erroneous*





*judgment than this. The studious, thoughtful Christian is always more unworldly and sincere than the Christian who reads but little and thinks still less... Study close, persevering study, improves his religious character. An indolent minister is not a spiritually-minded man. How much more favourable to the growth of piety is... a studious life than an indolent and day dreaming one! For the mind must do something. If it is not occupied with great and good themes, then it will be busy with small and frivolous ones." p. 285*

*"The fact is that the holiest men in the Christian Church have been the most studious men. Those spiritual minded and heavenly divines who accomplished most in the ministry of their own day, and who have been the lights and guides of the ministry up to this time, were men of great learning." p. 286*

***Firstly, then, a spiritually minded man will necessarily be a studious man.***

But, Shedd is quick to add the process does not stop there. He was too well aware of the dangers of rationalism to allow that. He recognized that truth was really just the raw material for devotion. Study must lead us to God himself, or it has failed to discharge its proper function. The scholar must pray.

*"Let [the preacher] not be satisfied with studying and pondering the best treatises in theology, or with studying and pondering even the Bible itself. Besides all this, and as the crowning and completing act in the religious life, let him actually and really pray." p. 294*

He sums this matter up perfectly in the following memorable words:

*"It is not sufficient to commune with the truth, for truth is impersonal. We must commune with the God of truth." p. 291*



There you have it. There must be truth. But truth is not enough. There must be active, vital communion with the God of truth, or we have not tasted of the essence of spiritual life.

I cannot but wonder if part of our problem today lies in our failure to maintain this intimate marriage of study and devotion that Shedd commends. I fear that many of us face a terrible danger of becoming too intellectual in our Christianity. Do not mistake what I am saying. I am not saying that we can ever use our intellects too much. But I am saying that it is possible to become thoroughly imbalanced in their use to the point where our Christianity becomes deformed. Unless what we read and study is assimilated and becomes the stuff of what we believe and live, we are going to become rationalistic and intellectual and that is what I fear is a very great danger to us today. True, there are vast sections of the church of Christ that suffer from the opposite plight; the abandonment of the mind in their Christian preaching and living. But that, I suspect, is not the peril that faces most of us here today. We have so many books that we can read and feel we that we need to read; there are so many magazines to peruse, and so many scholars to listen to, that we are losing the ability to meditate, absorb, and pray. Our learning is in danger of being simply heady rather than hearty. And spiritually minded people recognize that. Tozer put it well nearly fifty years ago when he said,

*"Sound Bible exposition is an imperative must in the church of the living God. Without it, no church can be a New Testament church in any strict meaning of that term. But exposition may be carried on in such a way as to leave the hearers devoid of any true spiritual nourishment whatever. For it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God himself, and unless and until the hearers find God in personal experience, they are not the better for having heard the truth. The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts." Pursuit of God, p. 13*



I commend this to you then as the first and indispensable quality a preacher must possess if he is going to be used powerfully by God. He must be a spiritually minded man; a man who makes the cultivation of real, vital religion the priority of his life.

## **II. DISCIPLINE**

A second quality Shedd considers essential in a powerful preacher is that of **discipline**. Again, lest we associate the term simply with that which is regimented, inflexible, and authoritarian, let us take a moment to explore more fully what he means by this term.

Perhaps the best way of doing so is by examining the different areas of a preacher's life that need to demonstrate this quality. The **first** is the **area of the mind**. A preacher must be able to control his mental habits, and more than that, he must be able to train them. Shedd, for example, sees a particular need for a preacher to develop a "methodizing" intellect.

*"By a methodizing intellect is meant one which spontaneously works in a logical manner, and to which consecutive reasoning has become natural." p. 200*

This kind of mental orderliness is essential, Shedd claims, especially in days when the public mind craves a short, sharp method in the pulpit. Mere brevity, he argues, will not satisfy them. Men and women, even in an age as impatient as our own, need to be fed. What they need is the greatest possible amount of matter compressed into the smallest possible form, all presented in the most energetic manner possible. And that, he insists, requires a strong methodizing power of mind. A preacher must cultivate the ability to seize the main points of a subject, hold them firmly in his grip like a vice, and then clothe them with beauty, warmth and vitality. As difficult as it may seem, it can be obtained by *"diligent and persevering method."* p. 48-50. Shedd was a firm believer that mental skill such as this could be cultivated. Listen to what he says in connection with developing a homiletical habit of mind:



*"By this is meant, such a habitual training of the mind as will impart a sermonizing tendency to it. The human understanding, by discipline and practice, may be made to work in any given direction, provided it is a legitimate one, with something of the uniformity, precision and rapidity of a machine. It can so be habituated to certain processes, that it shall go through them with very little effort, and yet with very great force." p. 93*

The mind can be trained. And it needs to be trained. But it requires discipline. Discipline must also show itself in *the area of application to study*. An effective preacher must be, in Shedd's estimation, a man of ripe and growing mental culture. He ought to have thought deeply and communed long with the best minds of the ages. This is not the work of a moment or an hour, as we all know, nor even of a college or seminary course. It is properly the work of a lifetime. A powerful preacher must be a man who is ever pushing back the frontiers of his own understanding, and deepening his grasp of the fundamentals of the Christian faith and human life. Progress will only be made if a preacher disciplines himself to read, and to read the very best books.

*"[He] .. must dare to by-pass all second-rate authors, and devote his days and nights to the first-rate. No matter how popular or brilliant a contemporary may be, no matter how active the popular mind in a certain direction, it is the true course [for a preacher] to devote his best powers to mastering those authors who have been tried by time, and are confessedly the first intellects of the race." p. 306*

The preacher's discipline should show itself also *in the promptness and exactness with which he performs all his duties*. Whether it is his pastoral visiting, his letter writing, his sermon preparation or in matters of practical family concern, the preacher must discipline himself to do things well.

*"The scrupulous and faithful performance of work of any kind improves both the mind and the heart.... the habit of doing work uniformly well,*



*and uniformly in time, is one of the best kinds of discipline.... If he half does his work, his moral character suffers. " p. 296*

Strength of character is ultimately the issue for Shedd. He is not interested in being pedantic or perfectionist. His primary concern is for vigorous personal and spiritual character. Preachers need to be men of character; they need to be men of courage, insight, wisdom and decision. This latter point he dwells on at length. A preacher must be a man who is prepared to be decisive. He does not encourage haste, and still less ignorant bigotry. But he does urge clarity, decision and judgment. In company with Charles Bridges, he recognizes that one of the faults of pastors is their reluctance to make judgments on issues. The fault becomes the more and more marked as the swelling tide of scholarship overwhelms us with our ignorance. We can easily reach a point of dreading the presumption of being certain about anything. And when that happens, our preaching loses its note of authority. What is the remedy? Not blind and precipitous haste; but courageous, careful judgment following disciplined and prayerful investigation. To have the strength of character we need to be compelling preachers, we must be self-disciplined men.

I am aware that in setting these requirements before you, I run the risk of discouraging you. Who is sufficient for these things? Not one of us, to be sure. But does that mean we relinquish our ideals and settle for that which is less than we ought to offer the Great Master we serve? I am reminded of a comment I read in Iain Murray's account of the life of Professor John Murray, known at Westminster Seminary not simply for the caliber of his teaching and scholarship, but also for his extraordinarily consistent and disciplined life. The point made by his biographer was that his colleagues, while respecting his manner of life deeply, tended to regard its exceptional character as a personal peculiarity, rather than a model to emulate. That is a danger we face whenever we are confronted with demands beyond our present level of achievement. We can dismiss them as idiosyncratic, and never experience the uplifting and strengthening effect they can have in our own lives. I would encourage you not to be overwhelmed by the ideals Shedd holds before us.



Rather, let each one of us, according to the measure of gift and grace given to us, endeavour to make the best use of our talents, never resting upon our oars, but ever seeking to become more fit and more usable instruments for our Lord and King.

### **III. INTENSITY**

Lastly, one cannot leave a discussion of Shedd's views on the necessary qualifications for powerful preaching without mentioning what might be called the quality of *intensity*. Shedd believed that there was need for greater intensity on the part of preachers in his day.

*"The principal lack in the current preaching" he writes, "is not so much in the matter as in the manner. There is truth sufficient to save the soul in most of the sermons that are delivered; but it is not so fused with the speaker's personal convictions, and presented in such living contact with the hearer's fears, hopes, and needs, as to make the impression of stern reality. The pulpit must become more intense in manner, or the 'form of sound words' will lose its power." p. 109-110*

Again, lest some fleeting mental caricature incline us to dismiss this emphasis, let us take a moment to ask what, precisely, Shedd means when he appeals for more 'intensity' on the part of preachers. Surely he cannot be pleading for that temperamental deformity that besets some of us, making us unable to relax or release our grip on the thoughts filling our minds. And surely he is not calling for that unhealthy introspection of mind that we have already heard him pronounce woes against. What then does he have in mind?

Three words may help us, **energy, focus and depth**. This is the nearest he comes to offering a definition of the trait we are considering, Shedd says that a preacher

*"Should be a man of great energy and simplicity of aim." p. 215*



In as much as he is able, a preacher should be a *man of one thing*. Admittedly, that is not always possible. Many earnest pastors and Christian workers are compelled to divide their energies between preaching and bread winning. This call for simplicity and intensity of aim on the part of a preacher ought not been seen as the condemnation of all who are for various reasons unable to devote the whole of their time to the ministry of the word. But to those who are, it is a challenge to seize the opportunity they have to concentrate on becoming the very best preachers they can possibly be. We seldom achieve anything significant without the discipline of concentrated, focused effort. That is particularly so in the realm of spiritual ministry. There are rare and wonderful moments to be sure when messages seem to wing their way to our minds untroubled for messages, to use Dr. Lloyd-Jones' terms, that are "given" to us but by and large, they are the exceptions. The rule calls for patient, persevering, concentrated study. And unless preachers are intensely focused on their calling, they will seldom excel in it.

**High aims** is a second way in which this intensity of character should express itself. The connection between casualness and mediocrity is close. If a preacher is to be effective, he must have an intense desire to effective. All of his powers must be concentrated on doing the very best that he can.

*"[A preacher ought] form a high ideal of a sermon, and constantly aim at its realization," Shedd writes in one place (p. 95). In another he says "The preacher's idea of a sermon must ... be as full and perfect as possible. He must not be content with an inferior grade of sermonizing, but must aim to make his discourses as excellent in matter and in manner as his powers, natural and acquired, will possibly allow... He ought to keep his ideal of a sermon high and bright before his eye, and not allow his mind, by the frequency and insufficiency of his preparations, to become accustomed to inferior performances, because this is the next step to becoming satisfied with them." p. 96-97*



This, undoubtedly, is the kind of intensity he had in view. No slackness, no time serving, no mediocrity, but constant, sterling effort to do the very best one can.

Finally, this intensity of character should show itself in *the serious earnestness* with which we go about our preaching task. Preachers should be serious, earnest men. Such a mood, in Shedd's mind, is the only frame consistent with the high and difficult task facing a preacher. Unlike the after dinner speaker, he does not speak to entertain or please. Unlike the politician, he does not aim at a momentary pencil stroke at a ballot box. He is in earnest to rescue and revive eternal souls. He is aiming at the transformation of the inner life of his hearers, and that, in a permanent way.

*"The eternal salvation of the human soul, through the presentation of divine truth, is the end of preaching. The created mind is never employed so loftily and so worthily, as when it is bending all its powers, and co-working with God himself, to the attainment of this great purpose.... The sermon is designed to produce an effect upon human character; and this not upon its mere superficialities, but its inmost principles.... It aims at the whole nature of man ... at the formation of an entire character." p.37, 41*

What other manner or state of mind and heart is fitting for a preacher about this work, than one that is intense. He may indeed be affable and amiable still, but he will be unerringly focused. He cannot ever be fully "off-duty" as it were. The immensity of his task never leaves him. He cannot help but be plain, direct, bold and passionate in other words, intense.

## **Part 2. The source of powerful preaching**

Lets begin by looking at what W.G.T. Shedd considered to be the source of powerful preaching. This we can identify and state simply. Shedd considered that *persistent, prayerful, careful study of the Bible* was the fountain at





which a man must drink if he is ever to become a powerful and impressive preacher.

On the surface, that sounds almost trite, a mere truism. But let me take you a little deeper into his thinking on this matter. What made Shedd lay such emphasis on careful, exegetical study of the Bible? What made him say, for example,

*"We ... maintain the position that the sacred orator is quickened by the analytical study of the sacred volume into a freedom, freshness and force, that are utterly beyond his reach without It." p. 6*

Three things compelled him to lay emphasis upon this point.

## **I. POWERFUL IDEAS**

The first was the conviction that the ***Bible is the only proper source of ideas*** for preaching. At the very outset of his book on Homiletics, we meet Shedd the classicist making a striking and very important little statement,

*"It is conceded by all, that eloquence is the product of ideas..." p. 1*

This principle, so basic to formal rhetoric, it is one that we need to pause to reconsider today. How many of us have, I wonder in our efforts to be powerful preachers, looked to mere strength of inner feeling to carry the day? And how many of us, when that passion has waned and the dust has settled, have been overcome with a sense of tragic failure? We sense that we have merely ignited our powder, but it has been without shot. We have spoken in white heat, but people have not been influenced beyond that moment. We supposed that mere feeling could generate force, and have been disappointed. "You are wrong," says Shedd. Eloquence; truly effective speaking, is the product of ideas, not mere words, and still less, mere human passion. Let a man's mind be filled with truly significant and substantial thoughts, his heart will begin to glow and his best and choicest words will rise from their resting place and make him truly eloquent. And, most important of all, people will be fed and helped and changed.



But, where do these ideas come from? Shedd insists that there is only one legitimate source; those ideas revealed by the divine mind and written in the Scriptures. He sees no room at all for a preacher to be an inventor of truth. His proper role is that of a student and interpreter of revelation. In other words, he is to be an exegete of God's Word. In a vivid analogy, he likens the preacher's calling to that of a naturalist, or of a scientist. The scientist recognizes, or at least should recognize that his task is to observe, to explore and to analyze the physical universe. He is a student of the creation, trying by every means at his disposal to explore the world about him. In a sense, he is an exegete of nature. In the same way, Shedd says, the preacher must be first and foremost a student of the mind of God revealed in the Scriptures.

*"The duty and function of the theologian is most certainly that of an interpreter, and that alone.... The attitude of the human mind toward revelation should be precisely the same as toward nature. The naturalist does not attempt to mould the mountains to his patterns; and the theologian must not strive to reconfigure the Scriptures to his private opinions...In the presence of both nature and revelation, man ... is a minister and interpreter, and not a creator and lord." pp. 3,4,5*

God, he insists, has given us in his Word a wealth of incomparable truth for preaching. Deep and unfathomable mines await our exploration. And the preacher must dig, and he must explore and enjoy this wonderful treasure store. This, he argues, is where it all begins. There is such a freshness, a fullness, a grandness about the revelation that God has given, that any man who cares to search in humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit, will here find a class of truths so deeply and uniquely compelling -so elevated -so adapted to the deepest human needs -that he shall never lack the substance nor the inspiration to be the most forceful of preachers.

*" Think for a moment of the contents of the Christian Scriptures... Bring to mind the ideas and doctrines which hang like a constellation in these heavens... weigh this immense mass of truth and dogma in the scales of a dispassionate intelligence, and say if the mind of the preacher will not be filled with freshness, with force and with originality, in proportion as he absorbs it." p. 11,12*



But, Shedd would add, let the preacher see to it that he approaches this study of God's Word in the right way. Yes, he must approach it rigorously and acutely, employing the best skills of his mind and the most helpful tools that he has at his disposal. But above this, he must approach it in the right spirit. There must be humility and receptivity - a "wise and docile reciprocity" as he puts it - about the preacher as he studies the Scriptures. He must explore it as one under its authority, and one who himself needs to receive its instruction. He must study it for his own good first of all, and then determine to share with others the nectar he himself has gathered. This is the true attitude that will fill a preacher's mind and heart with a store of truly significant ideas that he feels that he not only can, but must share with others.

One more thing in this connection needs to be mentioned. Let the preacher of the Word, Shedd says, in his role as a student of the Word, aim not simply to understand the doctrines and teachings of the Bible, but seek also to imbibe their spirit.

*"... It is the spirit of a book, and the spirit of an author, which is of chief importance.... He who has imbibed [the biblical spirit] from the close and penetrating study of the words, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, sections of the sacred volume, puts the seal of the Eternal Spirit upon everything that he writes, and everything that he utters...He then, whose public discourse is pervaded with the spirit of revelation, and who speaks as the oracles of God, will be eloquent in the highest style." p. 30- 32*

Ethereal as this may sound, it is important. We all recognize, I am sure, that the bold indictments of Israel's prophets carry with them the inbuilt demand for a response of contrition. Then as you read and study them, Shedd suggests, let your heart become contrite beneath them. There is only one response consistent with the seer's glimpse of the paradise to come, we say - wondering joy and earnest longing. Then, let your own soul thrill as you read the pages of the Apocalypse. Don't rest content with reading the Bible - absorb its very mood and spirit in your own soul. Having done that, you will be able to go and preach to others as those who have actually tasted the things



you proclaim. Preaching will be the outflow and overflow of your own heart - an emission of the energy and sweetness of your own soul.

These are things we need to be reminded of with force today. I am not convinced that our generation is nurturing the kind of biblical scholarship we must have if we are to have the kind of preaching we need. I do not dispute for a moment that technically speaking, we are a very advanced generation of preachers. We have resources and skills never known in any other age. But are we using them the right way? I am inclined to believe that the richness of our resources is one of the things that blight our preaching. Do not misunderstand me, I am not decrying the need for the best scholarship, nor calling for a reversion to an earlier age of scholarship. What I am calling for is the proper use of our scholarship. I am concerned that the plethora of tools and resources we have for helping us understand and interpret the Bible is deflecting our attention from actually studying the Bible itself. It is my observation that there is an almost reflex dependence upon the work of scholars among many ministers, to the point where there is little close, penetrating first-hand analysis of the Bible itself. As a result, our learning is borrowed, and it sounds borrowed. We do well to call to mind often the words of the late Professor John Murray who once wrote

*"... What I am going to stress is the necessity for diligent and persevering searching of the Scriptures; study whereby we shall turn and turn again the pages of Scripture; the study of prolonged thought and meditation by which our hearts and minds may become soaked with the truth of the Bible, and by which our deepest springs of thought, feeling and action may be stirred and directed; the study by which the Word of God will grip us, bind us, hold us, pull us, drive us, raise us up from the dunghill, bring us down from our high conceits and make us its bondservants in all of thought and life." Collected Writings of John Murray, Vol. 1 p. 3*

Without that commitment, we stand in danger of being mere middlemen; mere technicians, collecting, resorting, and transferring the thoughts and convictions of others to our hearers.



Could it be, that the powerlessness of the pulpit today is due in part to preachers being too far removed from the original spring of their life, freshness and power - the Bible itself?

## **II. COMPELLING AUTHORITY**

Leaving this first and fundamental reason why the study of Scripture is so important, let us turn to a second. According to Shedd, careful, *exegetical study of the Bible is essential to powerful preaching because it is necessary to authority in preaching*. And authority belongs to the essence of powerful preaching.

What is it that gives preaching true moral and spiritual power? In large measure, it is the consciousness that what we are hearing is not merely the word of man, but the Word of God. As such, it comes to us with compelling force - the force of an obligation to submit and respond. If God is the supreme and rightful Governor of the world, then his voice is a voice of command. Preaching comes to its rights when it becomes the heralding of the authoritative word of the sovereign Lord to the minds and hearts of people. When it becomes that, it must be heard, and it must be heeded. For truth to have impact it must be more than suggestive or speculative. It must be declarative, and carry with it the weight of an absolute and inescapable authority.

But how can preaching approach that state? What enables a sinful man to stand up and speak as though he were uttering the oracles of God? Isn't such a suggestion blasphemous? Indeed not, says Shedd. It is not the sin of preaching to aspire to this, but its glory. For the preacher has received in the written Word the very oracles of God, and in as much as he knows and understands them, he may indeed become a herald wielding divine authority. This is the awesome possibility of preaching and its need in every age.

*"The first and indispensable requisite ... in both speculative theology and practical homiletics, is authority; and this authority must be found in a direct and special communication from the mind of God, or it can be found nowhere. Throw the Scriptures out of the account, and the whole human race*



*is upon a dead level. No portion of it, no one age or generation of it, is entitled to teach another." p. 20,21*

Let a man, be he ever so meek and shrinking by natural temperament, be gripped by the certainty of his message and the authority that lies behind it, and he must become a commanding preacher. There is, writes Shedd, a "*high celestial dogmatism*" that is necessitated by the reception of divine revelation. "*There is no option. There may be natural timidity; there may be the shrinking nature of the weeping prophet; but the instant the mind perceives that the eternal intelligence has originated and communicated a series of revelations, the instant the ear hears the 'thus saith the Lord,' a transformation takes place, and human weakness becomes immortal strength.*" p. 26,27

But again, I ask, how can that happen? How can a preacher reach that point of certainty that enables him to speak with finality, as the oracles of God? Shedd has the answer for us:

*"The thorough exegesis and comprehension of the written Word of God endow the human mind with authority." p. 19*

There is only one way. An authoritative preacher must be a careful student of the Bible. He must be sure that the Bible is God's word, that he has rightly understood God's Word, that he is rightly applying God's Word. In just the measure this is true, his preaching will be authoritative.

Shedd complained that authority was a sadly missing element of the pulpit in his day.

*"Certainly", he can write, " there never was greater need of originality and authority within the province of religion than now." p.27*

We would rise to contest that our age is in even deeper need than that of Shedd's for the quality of commanding force in its preachers. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was certainly of that opinion. True, we are in an age that resents authority. But resent it or not, there is a quality about true spiritual authority that compels people to hear. Our confused and rebellious age desperately needs to hear a note of certainty in its preachers. But as we have seen, that will only come through the Spirit-illuminated study of Scripture. Let this be another



incentive to drive us back to the Book itself. By all means, let us use the guides past and present that can help us reach a certain understanding of the mind of God in the Bible. But let us also remember that it is close and direct contact with the Bible itself that imparts the certainty we crave.

### **III. PROFOUND FEELING**

Thirdly and finally, Shedd commends ***the prayerful, careful study of the Bible as the source of power in preaching because of its impact upon the inner religious life of the preacher himself.*** Preaching, he insists, is not simply a matter of communicating ideas from one mind to another. It calls for truth to be conveyed through the total humanity of the preacher to the total humanity of his hearers. God does use the human instrument in the act of preaching. And he uses not simply the unique structure and character of a preacher's mind to give shape to the message, but uses his religious character to vivify that message with warmth and life.

A preacher, Shedd claims,

*"...needs a strong stir and impulse of holy affections in order to succeed in his vocation... Without that warm glow that comes from a warm heart ... purely intellectual excitement.. will fail to influence the hearer in the way of emotion and action. A purely intellectual force and energy may arrest and interest an audience; but, taken by itself, it cannot persuade their wills or melt their hearts." p. 199, 114*

That, it seems to me strikes at the heart of one of the missing components of much modern preaching. We have a great deal of light, to use the familiar image, but not nearly so much heat. Consequently, our preaching often fails to touch the heart. It emanates from the mind, and at best, it lodges in the mind. We shall never have truly powerful preaching until we have preachers who are themselves powerfully affected by the truths they preach.

And how is that to happen? Here again, Shedd would contest, the patient, loving study of Scripture holds the answer. What is the source of profound spiritual feeling? How can those valid religious affections of love, joy, grief,



compassion, tenderness and indignation are awakened from their slumber and be caused to take hold of a man and turn him into a flaming messenger of the Lord? There is a way, says Shedd. It is not found by looking within. Subjectivity is fatal to true and strong feelings. Spinning on the axis of your own broodings is not likely to produce robust and vigorous feeling, he says, but poisonous sentimentality. You must look outward, and contemplate the proper objects of feeling is you are going to arouse feeling.

*"The mind cannot think successfully without an object of thought, and the heart cannot feel strongly and truly without an object of feeling. There can be no manifestation of power, therefore, and no force in the finite mind, except as it has been nourished, stimulated and strengthened by an object other than itself." p. 64-65*

Once more, then, he leads us back to the Scriptures. Has there ever been a source of truth and ideas more calculated to excite true and vigorous feeling than the Bible? Is there anything conceivably more wonderful than the fact that we can have fellowship with the infinite and eternal God; that he has pardoned our sins in Christ; that he has prepared a kingdom for us? Let these ideas be duly considered and they are bound to stir us in a way that nothing else ever can. Our want of vital, living pulsating spiritual life is a reflection of our failure to be impressed by the spiritual realities of our calling. And nothing can overcome that lack but diligent, prayerful study of the Bible

In closing, let me say that I cannot but believe that part of the ineffectiveness of our preaching today lies in our failure to grasp the proper role and function of emotion in human life. Those of more academic bent have been guilty at times of despising and dismissing emotion altogether, almost as though it had no legitimate existence in our psychology. Feelings, it is claimed, are inherently untrustworthy. Indeed they are, but so too is the corrupted intellect. We have not distinguished in our minds between sentiment and proper emotion; between corrupt passion and legitimate moral and spiritual affections. In doing so, we deny an element of our humanity, and more importantly, rob ourselves of essential insight into the workings of the human





mind and will. In practice, we have become mere informers rather than persuaders.

Perhaps I am overstating the case, but I ask you to at least consider this matter. I consider the reaction against emotionalism that has driven many preachers into a very didactic and intellectual manner of speaking, something that needs correcting. We need to re-read Shedd and Dabney and their contemporaries, and consider afresh their helpful discussion on the place of feelings in preaching. Until we understand their place and function, I am convinced we will never be adequate preachers.

This, then, is how I understand how Shedd would counsel us regarding the subject of the source of powerful preaching were he with us today. He would not begin by pointing to methods and techniques. He would rather take us back to the deeper, root source of power in preaching, and the careful, prayerful study of the Scriptures. And he would tell us that there is, for each and everyone who dares to devote themselves to this basic task, an ample supply of that rich and compelling truth that form the fuel both of authority and affection, to ensure that even the humblest man can become a flaming and seraphic preacher. May the Lord of the Word send us back to its reverent, loving study with fresh hope.

### **Part 3: The form of powerful preaching**

At the outset of this our third study together, it is perhaps helpful to pause for a moment to reflect on why we are considering Shedd on Preaching.

It is not, as I have indicated to engage in an exercise in biography, or the history of preaching. Our primary concern rather is with the matter of powerful preaching. Some of us are deeply concerned at the absence of spiritually impressive preaching in our pulpits, and see it as one of the great needs of the hour to understand why it is so lacking among us. And to that end, we are



exploring the thought of Shedd, a master homiletician and powerful preacher from the past, to see if he can help us discover the root of our malaise and point us to ways we can repair it.

It might well be queried why we need to do this. Surely, some will say, the answer is simple. Our fundamental need is plainly that of greater spirituality. Were we to experience an outpouring of spiritual power as in days of revival, all of this analysis and talk about preaching would become unnecessary. Really what we ought to be doing is devoting these hours we have together to prayer.

I agree heartily that our supreme need is for the Holy Spirit to work among us in power. No amount of rhetorical genius or culture will ever make a man an effective preacher. Only the anointing of the Holy Spirit can do that, and indeed, we ought to never cease to plead that God would bless us with a visitation of power.

But even should he do so, a question remains. Would there be any less need for understanding the dynamics of effective preaching? Or, to put it another way, does the Holy Spirit use means adapted to his ends when he moves in power among men, or does he not? Were we to experience a special moving of the Holy Spirit in power, could preachers suddenly become careless of how they thought, of how they organized their ideas, and of how they expressed themselves? My understanding of revival and of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is such that I must say no. I understand that when the Holy Spirit fills us and takes hold of us, what happens is that we find all of our natural gifts and faculties quickened and enlarged, but not by-passed. The mind is filled with clearer insight, the heart enflamed with deeper feeling, and the will bent more earnestly upon obedience. Everything natural is sanctified and supercharged as it were, and made the more effective instrument of divine use. That, too, is how Shedd sees the matter.

*"It is true that the first and efficient cause of this effect must be sought in the special and direct operation upon the individual soul of a higher Being than man. Yet it is equally true that the secondary instrumental cause of this*



*renewal is divine truth presented by the preacher. There must, therefore, be an adaptation between the cause and the effect, in this case as much as in any other. Second causes must be adapted to the effect as much as first causes. There is a mode of presenting divine truth which is suited to produce conversion, and there is a mode which is not suited to this end." p. 41-42*

Far then from relieving us of the duty of cultivating those gifts and skills that will help us present truth effectively, our belief in the ministry of the Holy Spirit compels us to do all in our power to make ourselves fit vessels for his use. We do not trust in our culture or technique, but we consecrate it to him, believing that he uses the means that he made when he formed us in his own image.

Lets consider the second aspect of our study of powerful preaching, namely *the form of powerful sermons*. Is the spiritual impact of our preaching in any way connected to the manner in which our material is presented? Does the capacity and state of mind of our hearers need to be considered? Is content all that matters, or is form of some relevance?

WGT Shedd has no hesitation in answering these questions. Form is important, he says. We must understand the people we are speaking to, and realize that there are fundamental laws and principles that affect how they receive information from others. And we must also appreciate that there are particular cultural moods that will influence how readily we will be understood and listened too. He could say, for example, of his own generation,

*"The greatest difference between the men of the present day and their forefathers consists in the greater distinctness and rapidity of their mental processes. They are not more serious and thoughtful than their ancestors are, but they are more vivid, animated, and direct in their thinking than they were. They are more impatient of prolixity, of a loose method of arrangement, and of a heavy, dragging method in the exhibition of truth.... The public audience now craves a short method, a distinct, sharp statement, and a rapid and accelerating movement, upon the part of its teachers." p.48*



This is an aspect of preaching which does not always receive the degree of attention which, in my opinion, it requires. True, it is possible for an interest in form to outrun a concern for content, and to become a great hindrance to effective preaching. But it is also possible for us to become so remote from our hearers and so unrealistic in our expectations, that our preaching requires a miracle to be comprehended let alone useful. Shedd has some penetrating words of counsel in this regard for preachers who are intellectually inclined:

*"The studious, thoughtful mind especially needs the influence of homiletical discipline, in order to prepare it for the work of addressing and influencing the popular audience. There is a method of so organizing the materials in the mind, of so arranging and expanding and illustrating truth, as to exert the immediate impression of rhetoric, united with the permanent impression of logic and philosophy. This method can be acquired only by the study and the practice of the art of sermonizing." p. 45*

Well then, what elements of form or style does Shedd consider indispensable to powerful and effective preaching? He lists three, **plainness, force and beauty**. Let us consider these in turn.

## **1. PLAINNESS**

Shedd asserts that **powerful preaching must be plain preaching**. By that he does not mean dull, commonplace or trite preaching. He is all for loading sermons with substantial teaching. But, he insists that this wonderful, heart-moving and life-transforming material must be presented in a plain form.

What does he mean by this? Shedd is using the term plainness to refer to ease of understanding and comprehension. A plain preacher is one who is easy to understand. No one will ever be an effective preacher if he cannot be understood. People must be able to see clearly and immediately to the heart of one's thought. Power, Shedd affirms, is connected with contact; contact between the speaker's soul and the hearer's. He will be the most effective speaker whose ideas go straight to the minds and hearts of his hearers.



*"The thoughts which the religious teacher presents to the common mind should go straight to the understanding. Everything that covers up and envelops the truth should be stripped off from it, so that the bare reality may be seen. There is prodigious power in this plainness of presentation. It is the power of actual contact. A plain writer or speaker makes the truth and the mind impinge on one another. When the style is plain, the mind of the hearer experiences the sensation of being touched; and this sensation is always impressive, for a man starts when he is touched." p. 55*

There you have his meaning. Plain preaching strips away everything that might hinder the ideas of the preacher making their mark upon the hearts of his hearers. Our preaching should have a quality of transparency about it. The light that has flooded our own minds and hearts ought to stream from us without diffraction, reflection, or distortion into the minds of our hearers. And to do that, we need to be plain.

What is it that makes for plainness of speech or writing? Shedd points to several essential requirements for this quality. **First**, he says, there must be **distinctness of thought**. Our ideas must take distinct shape. We shall never be plain speakers and powerful speakers so long as our impressions of truth remain at the level of mystical intuitions. They must rise above that and be brought to the point of being stated as clear propositions. We must force ourselves, by every power of thought, logic and analysis we possess, to extract our thoughts from the shimmering mirage-like form in which they often first appear, and express them in the form of concrete ideas. Until we do so, they will remain indistinct, incompletely distinguished from other ideas, and unable to stand in their own right and be communicated with effect.

*"It is not enough that thoughts be seen through a clear medium; they must be seen in a distinct shape... A style may be as transparent as water, and yet the thoughts be destitute of boldness and individuality. Such a style cannot be charged with obscurity, and yet, it does not set truth before the mind of the reader or hearer in a striking and impressive manner." p. 53*

Closely related to this matter of distinctness is that of **clarity**. It is possible to have our ideas distinct from one another, in the sense that they stand apart



from each other and have a definite and clear relation to others, and yet not give clear, accurate, adequate expression to them. We must work hard at using the best words in the best way to convey our meaning to people with clarity. No one should ever have to ask, 'What did he mean?' The moment a shadow of obscurity is cast over our thoughts no matter how important and impressive they be, they have lost their power to affect people. If the first step to achieving plainness is the discipline of hammering our ideas into distinct form, the second is expressing them in clear language.

There is a third that walks hand in hand with these other two, namely, **simplicity**. Our thoughts may be distinct in their outline; we may have been able to find words that express them with great exactness; but they may nevertheless still lack simplicity. The words we have chosen may be technical or outdated; our forms of expression too compressed and abstract in their precision. If that happens, we will miss our hearers. It requires savage discipline and effort to make the obscure simple. The task of us thinking in a concrete and visual is a special challenge. Few of us appreciate how often we lapse into abstract ways of speaking and writing. If we are not careful, we can find ourselves living and speaking in terms remote from the concrete and commonplace lives of our ordinary hearers. J.C. Ryle, speaking on this very point, urges preachers to heed the ancient Arabian principle which says that the best speakers are those who can turn "ears into eyes." We need to work hard to ensure that the ideas in our preaching are marked by distinctness, and expressed in clear, simple language.

To do so, we will need to **hold a knife to the throat of every trace of pride** that surges within us. Plain preaching is not showy preaching. It takes "a very strong will, a very high character" Shedd claims, to resist the temptation to impress our hearers with our depth of learning or skill of language.

*"Now there is nothing," he says, "that will prevent a preacher from falling into this false manner, but a determination to be plain, - a determination, whether he does anything else or not, to bring the truth into contact with the human understanding." p. 58,59*



To speak to be understood by the children who hear us, for example, necessarily calls us to shed every superficial indicator of learning. It will be our truest brilliance to make the obscure and complex plain. I know of few things more humbling than to toil for hours to make a difficult passage plain, only to have a hearer say afterwards how simple and obvious everything was anyway. That kind of comment, while a compliment to our scholarship, is a dagger to our pride.

Could it be, I ask, that part of the reason for the want of true spiritual power in the pulpit is connected with our failure to preach plainly? Has our laziness hindered us from working as hard as we need to be clear and simple and distinct? Has our pride kept us from being as plain as we need to be? We do well to bear in mind that we will not be effective instruments of the Holy Spirit's power if we speak in ways that require from him a prior miracle of interpretation before there can be any work of application. Let us, to use Shedd's words, *determine* to be plain, determine to be so intelligible that the mind of our hearers cannot fail to understand us.

## **II. FORCE**

A second quality of form or style that Shedd commends is **force**. I like his definition of this term as it relates to style, or to the form of preaching. He describes it **as the quality of penetration**. Some people, he says, speak with a power that pricks. Their words penetrate beyond the point of the mind, and seem to wing their way into the depths of the soul.

*"The principal quality in a forcible style," Shedd says, "and that which first strikes our attention, is penetration. While listening to a speaker of whom this property is a characteristic, our minds seem to be pricked as with needles, and pierced as with javelins. His thought cuts through the more dull and apathetic parts into the quick, and produce a keen sensation. Force is electrical; it permeates and thrills." p.72*

I well remember experiencing what Shedd is talking about at a conference in Auckland, New Zealand some years ago. The speaker concerned spoke in such a way that his words seemed to strike a path into the very deepest



recesses of the heart. I sat there, at times for over an hour at a time, riveted. Every word seemed to make contact with my inner man, and I found myself stirred and moved in ways I have never known since. What was it that gave this man's words such penetrative force? Is the only explanation a peculiar anointing of the Holy Spirit? Or are other human factors involved as well?

Shedd contends that there are distinctive features of forceful speaking that can be identified and explained. Foremost among them **is *the innate power that lies in the ideas*** we are conveying. Force, he insists, does not lie in the sheer energy of the human mind, nor in the intensity with which we may express ourselves. At heart, it springs from the power of ideas and principles themselves.

Think about this for a moment. While we may not be used to toying with such ideas in the terms Shedd uses, we are all familiar with the relative force innate in different ideas. Were I to say, for example, 'The sky outside is bright blue,' you would all understand what I meant, but probably promptly forget what I had said. However, were I to say, 'The Lord Jesus will soon return with myriads of angels to end this age,' you would be aware of my words registering more deeply upon your consciousness. Why? Because they were more clear? No. Simply because the ideas expressed are more significant and inherently more weighty. Now that, says Shedd, is a feature of all forceful speaking. Ideas penetrate when they have substance. A commonplace expression will fall like a snowflake upon our consciousness, whereas a well refined nugget of truth will pierce the most apathetic mind as David's stone did Goliath's skull. Let a preacher saturate his mind with the peerless truths of Scripture, and let his own spirit imbibe their power, and he cannot but be a forceful man.

It is at this point that I personally have received the greatest help from Shedd. Were you to look at pages 63-65 in my copy of *Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*, you would find them disfigured by marking to the point of being almost illegible. For many years, I grappled with the issue of how to preach





effectively; how to find those ideas and sentiments that would thrill and nourish those I was speaking to. Often times I admit, I lapsed into what was little more than sterile brooding; a fault to which some of us are more temperamentally inclined than others. In Shedd I found the antidote. Subjective processes, he thunders, the musing, reflective, brooding habits that the mind can so easily lapse into, spell its ruin. The mind was made to look outward, not inward. It is by steadily contemplating truths objective to itself that the mind gains vigour and energy and strength. "Insulation, isolation and subjective processes" can lead to nothing but the destruction of all energy and vitality in your mind. But on the other hand, "communion with real and solid verities promotes both." p. 65

*"The oratorical power of the preacher," he claims, "depends upon his recipiency; upon his contemplation of those ideas and doctrines which the Supreme Mind has communicated to the created and dependent spirit; upon his clearly beholding them, and receiving through his intuition a fund of knowledge and force of which he is naturally destitute." p. 67*

In simple terms, what Shedd is saying is this. If you would be a forceful preacher, then you must have forceful ideas to convey. And there is only one place to find such ideas. You do not find them by looking within. You find them by gazing upon the revelation that God has given us. Absorb it into your being, and you will be necessarily a forceful preacher.

It is perhaps worth adding that Shedd distinguishes between force as it relates to the penetrative power of a preacher's words, and the mere strength of feeling or passion with which he may speak. True force will always be accompanied by passion. One cannot contemplate profound ideas without feeling deeply. But it is possible to have deep feeling without true force. A preacher may rouse himself to a state of feeling and passion by sheer will, imagination, or rhetorical facade. He may master the art of varying intonation and pace, of pitch and action, but his going in circles may have precious little lasting impact. Indeed, the fluster of his acting may eventually wear him out.



*"The created mind" Shedd says, " may endeavour to make for [its] want of inward power by a stormy and passionate energy; but... sooner or later the overtasked, because unassisted, intellect gives out...." p. 75*

True force concerns penetration, not simple passion. And it is to be found in the constant study of God's Word.

### **III. BEAUTY**

The third and final property of style, or form that Shedd discusses is **beauty**. In drawing attention to this, I realize that this quality may strike you, as it did me at first, as somewhat superfluous and unnecessary for us to consider. We associate beauty with that which is ornate, that which is pretties, that which is decorative. And we have neither room nor need for those things in our preaching.

However, before we condemn Shedd for placing the emphasis he does upon this property, we do well first to listen to what he understands by it. We soon find that our perception has been inadequate. We find that Shedd shares our aversion to everything showy. His concept of beauty has little to do with that which sparkles and flashes, but has everything to do with completeness, and symmetry, and order. Listen to how he defines it:

*"The essential principle of beauty is that by which all the manifoldness and variety in an object is moulded into unit and simplicity...[Beauty] has a spontaneous origin. It springs into existence whenever the mind has succeeded in imparting the properties of unity and simplicity to a multitude of particulars which, taken by themselves, are destitute of these properties." p. 76, 79*

Few of us, perhaps, have thought of beauty in these terms. In fact, few of us have ever thought about the essence of beauty at all. The moment we do, however, we recognize that Shedd is right. What is it that makes one painting beautiful, but another garish. Is it not that the one has every component in proper proportion, place and balance, every colour and tone fitly blended together? The impact of the whole is that of perfection and completeness.



The other, we note, is marked by discord and impropriety in every detail. Perspective is distorted, colour is misplaced and mismatched, the composition is disorientated. Its ugliness relates not to the quality of the paint, nor the skill of the artist's technique, but to the absence of order and balance. Now that, Shedd says, is exactly what we are talking about when we talk about beauty in a sermon. We are talking about its completeness. It is something spontaneous; something that arises from within, and not something washed on from outside.

*"It is too much the habit to regard beauty as mere ornamentation, as something that is added to other properties, instead of growing out of them. Hence it is too much the habit to cultivate the beautiful in isolation, - to set it up before the mind as an independent quality, and to make every other quality subservient to it... Thus, it appears that true beauty is not an ornament washed on from without, but an efflux from within." p. 79, 82*

No one can quarrel with this concept of beauty. It reflects our innate appreciation of order in our Father's beautiful, though sin-marred world. Yet, have we appreciated its importance in our preaching? Has our addiction to objectivity, and to teaching, inoculated us with the belief that as long as something is substantial and true, its form matters little? We do well to listen to Dabney who insists that the preacher's task is not simply to persuade his hearers that what he is saying is true, but that it is also *good*. Our object in preaching is to see the hearts of people persuaded to believe and act that means that we must help them to do more than just understand. We must help them love and desire what they hear to be right and to that end, it is fitting that our preaching should have this quality of innate beauty about it.

But how is it to be achieved? Here Shedd comes to our rescue again with commanding and helpful insights. Beauty, he says, is **a product of structural form**. A sermon needs unity and order and completeness to possess this quality. Foremost among these requirements in Shedd's mind, is **unity**, a single object in view. Here his homiletics reveals his strong attachment to classical rhetoric. A discourse, he insists, must always center upon a single theme.



*"The sermon must preserve an oratorical character. It should never allow either the philosophical or the poetical element to predominate over the rhetorical. The sermon should be eloquence, and not poetry or philosophy. It should be a discourse that exhibits singleness of aim, and a converging progress towards an outward practical end." p. 128*

Here, I am well aware, he might meet with dissent from many of us here today. The expository methods of our day tend to reflect a closer adherence to the structure of the text itself than the rounded symmetry of a classical oration. They tend to be more exegetical than oratorical. Far be it for Shedd or anyone else to lay down inflexible rules at this point. But at the same time, let me urge you to reconsider the point that he makes. It is my persuasion that some contemporary expository preaching is deficient at points. For one thing, it often taxes concentration and memory by its many diverse and scarcely related thoughts. Rather than containing a succession of ideas that build upon and reinforce each other, our sermons tend to be a dislocated array of thoughts that compete with each other for retention and application. Instead of encountering a single point of convergence that compels them to respond to a single truth, our listeners are often faced with having to deal with a number of scarcely related applicatory comments. Rather than carrying them with us in our exposition to a point of climax, we lead them along a faltering and directionless course that breeds an ever-increasing sense of tedium. The properties of converged focus, movement and climax are often missing from our preaching. Need we be surprised, then, that it fails to make much impression? Men and women are often failing to respond to what we preach because they have not felt the weight of it. They will not respond if we merely scatter our bread aimlessly over the flock. It requires clear aim, relentless pursuit, and searching appeal to achieve that end. Listen to what Shedd says:

*[A sermon should be] "A rounded and symmetrical discourse, pervaded by one idea, breathing but one spirit, rushing forward with a uniformly accelerating motion, and ending with an overpowering impression and influence upon the will." p. 130*



I ask, is not this kind of sermonic form better adapted to being an instrument of the Holy Spirit in producing a deep and lasting impression upon people rather than that which meanders across the fertile countryside of a text commenting here and exhorting there? Remember that our specific concern is with the issue of powerful, impressive preaching. The Holy Spirit can and often does use the most incidental of comments to work his work in lives. But that is not his usual method. I suggest that we need to give fresh consideration and urgent attention to securing more of what Shedd calls beauty in our sermons - a singleness of aim and convergence of thought and practical end that gives them an overall quality and unity that makes them more retainable and useful.

*"... Sermons are more defective in respect to unity of structure, and a constant progress towards a single end, than in any other respect," says Shedd. "But these are strictly oratorical qualities, and can be secured only by attending to the nature and laws of eloquence, - to the rhetorical, as distinguished from the philosophical presentation of truth." p. 129*

I leave you with the challenge to consider deeply whether or not form has a part to play in this matter of powerful preaching. In essence, it all comes back to our starting point. Is spiritual power simply a function of the Holy Spirit's sovereign work, his anointing upon words irrespective of their form, order or structure? Or does the divine Spirit ordinarily work through means adapted to his purposes? If so, we are compelled to spare no effort in making our preaching plain, forceful and beautiful.

With that I am finished. I began by saying that I had found Shedd and unfailing source of inspiration and help over the past years. I trust that you can now appreciate a little better why. I cannot escape the conclusion that the ideals he expounds, (by no means unique to him, I might add), lie at the foundation of powerful preaching. As I have already said, I am not decrying the contributions of more recent homileticians. But at the same time, I am not convinced that they are offering us what we most need. We do not necessarily need techniques to help us cast propositions in uniquely homiletical forms. But what we do need is redirecting back and back and back



again to the basics that these older giants had mastered so well. Just as Isaac reopened the wells Abraham's servants had dug, we too need to re-explore the homiletical emphases of our fathers. And it is my prayer that as we do, heavenly power will begin to stream through us bringing with it unprecedented blessing to our needy generation.

**Appendix:**

**SERMON - RELIGIOUS MEDITATION.**

**Psalm 104 34, " My meditation of Him shall be sweet."**

There is no being with whom man stands in such close and important relations as with the invisible God, and yet there is no being with whom he finds it so difficult to have communication. The earth he can see and touch. His fellow man he can look in the eye and speak to. But at no man hath seen God at any time." Century after century passes by, and the Highest utters no voice that is audible to the outward ear. Thousands and millions of human supplications are sent up to Him who dwells in the heavens, but the heavens are not rent, no deity comes down, and no visible sign is made. The skies are silent. The impenetrable veil between man's body and God's spirit is not withdrawn even for an instant.

As this continues to be the case generation after generation, and century after century, it is natural that those who know of nothing but an external and visible communication between themselves and their Maker should become skeptical concerning his actual existence. Like the pagan idolater, they demand a God who can be seen and handled. Like him, too they hanker after prodigies and wonders, and desire to be put into palpable communication with the Celestial Powers. " This generation seeketh after a sign." It is not surprising, consequently, that the natural man, finding no response to his passionate and baffled attempts to penetrate the invisible and eternal by the method of the five senses, falls into unbelief, and concludes in his heart that a deity who never shows himself has no real being.

Thus the natural tendency of all men who hold no prayerful and spiritual communication with their Maker is to atheism, so long as they live in a world where he makes no external displays of his person and his presence. A time is indeed coming, when an outward vision of God will break upon them so palpable and evident that they will call upon the rocks and mountains to cover them from it; but until that time they are liable to a skepticism which often



renders it difficult, even when they make some efforts to the contrary, to believe that there is a God.

But the child of God-the believing, the spiritual, the prayerful man-is delivered from this atheism. For he knows of an intercourse with his Maker, which, though unattended by signs and wonders, by palpability and tangibility for the bodily senses, is as real and convincing as anything outward or visible can be. He has experienced the forgiveness of sin, and found the disquieting remorse of his soul displaced by the peace of God in his conscience, and the love of God in his heart. He has known the doubts and fears of a sick bed to give way before God's inward assurance of mercy and acceptance, He has been in a horror of great mental darkness, and into that black void of his soul God has suddenly made a precious promise, or a comforting truth distinct, and glittering night sky. He has had love, and peace, and joy, and the whole throng of devout and spiritual affections, flow in currents through his natural hard and parched soul, at the touch of a Spirit, at the breath of a Being, not of earth or time. And perhaps more convincing than all, he has offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, for a strength that was not in himself but which he must get or die, for a blessing that his hungry famine struck soul must obtain or be miserable, and has been heard in that he feared. Thus the Christian's belief in Divine existence is a vital one. In a higher sense than that of the poet, it is "felt in the blood, and felt along in the heart." It is part and particle of his consciousness, waning only as his religious experience wanes, and dying only when that deathless thing shall die.

Yet there are fluctuations in the Christian's faith and sense of God. He needs to school and train himself in this reference. God himself has appointed instrumentalities by which to keep the knowledge of himself pure, clear, and bright in the souls of his children, "until the day break and the shadows flee away:" and among them is the habit of devout reflection upon his being and attributes.

The uses of religious meditation upon God, to which we are urged by both the precept and the example of the Psalmist, may be indicated in the three following propositions:

**1.Meditation upon God is a lofty and elevating act, because God is infinite in his being and perfection's. 2.It is a sanctifying act, because God is holy in his nature and attributes. 3.It is a blessed act of the mind, because God is infinitely blessed, and communicates of his fullness of joy to all who contemplate it.**

**1. In the first place, meditation upon God is a high and elevating mental act, because of the immensity of the Object.** "Behold the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee," said the awe-struck Solomon. 11 God is a most pure spirit, immutable, immense," says the Creed. Reflection upon that which is infinite tends of itself to enlarge and ennoble. Meditation upon that which is immense produces a lofty mood of mind. This is true even of merely material immensity. He who often looks up into the firmament, and views the great orbs that fill it, and the great movements that take place in it, will come



to possess a spirit akin to this material grandeur-for the astronomical spirit is a lofty one-while he who keeps his eyes upon the ground, and looks at nothing but his little plot of earth, and his own little life with its little motions, will be apt to possess a spirit groveling like the things he lives among, and mean like the dirt he treads upon. Says the thoughtful and moral Schiller: ' "The vision of unlimited distances and immeasurable heights, of the great ocean at his feet and the still greater ocean above him, draws man's spirit away from the narrow sphere of sense, and from the oppressive stricture of physical existence. A grander rule of measurement is held out to him in the simple majesty of Nature, and environed by her great forms he can no longer endure a little and narrow way of thinking. Who knows how many a bright thought and heroic resolve, which the student's chamber or the academic hall never would have originated, has been started out by this lofty struggle of the soul with the great spirit of Nature; who knows whether it is not in part to be ascribed to a less frequent intercourse with the grandeur of the material world, that the mind of man in cities more readily stoops to trifles, and is crippled and weak, while the mind of the dweller beneath the broad sky remains open and free as the firmament under which it lives."

But if this is true of the immensity of Nature, much more is it of the immensity of God. If the sight of the heavens and the stars, of the earth and the vast seas, has a natural tendency to elevate and ennoble the human intellect, much more will the vision granted only to the pure in heart - the vision of the infinite Being who made all these things-exalt the soul above all the created universe. For the immensity of God is the immensity of mind. The infinity of God is an infinity of truth, of purity, of justice, of mercy, of love, and of glory. When the human intellect perceives God, it beholds what the heaven of heavens does not possess and cannot contain. His grandeur and plenitude is far above that of material creation; for he is the source and the free power whence it all came. The magnificence and beauty of the heavens and earth are the work of his fingers; and there is nothing which the bodily sense can apprehend, by day or by night, however sublime and glorious it may be, that is not infinitely inferior to the excelling, transcending glory of God.

It is one of the many injuries which sin does to man, that it degrades him. It excludes him from the uplifting vision of the Creator, and causes him to expend his mental force upon inferior objects-upon money, houses, lands, titles, and "the bubble reputation." Sin imprisons man within narrow limitations, and thus dwarfs him. And it is one of the consequences of his regeneration that he is enabled to soar again into the realm of the Infinite, and

behold unlimited perfection, and thereby regain the dignity he lost by apostasy. For it is a moral and spiritual difference that marks off the hierarchies of heaven from the principalities of hell. Rational beings rise in grade and glorious dignity by virtue of their character. But this character is intimately connected with the clear, unclouded contemplation of God. It is the beatific vision that renders the archangels so lofty. And it is only through a spiritual beholding of God that man can reascend to the point but little lower than the angels, and be crowned again with glory and honor.





**11. In the second place, meditation upon God is a sanctifying act, because God is holy and perfect in his nature and attributes.** The meditation of which the Psalmist speaks in the text is not that of the schoolman, or the poet, but of the devout, saintly, and adoring mind. That meditation upon God which is "sweeter than honey and the honey-comb" is not speculative, but practical. That which is speculative and scholastic springs from curiosity. That which is practical flows from love. This is the key to this distinction, so frequently employed in reference to the operations of the human mind. All merely speculative thinking is inquisitive, acute, and wholly destitute of affection for the object. But all practical thinking is affectionate, sympathetic, and in harmony with the object. When I meditate upon God because I love him, my reflection is practical. When I think upon God because I desire to explore him, my thinking is speculative. None, therefore, but the devout and affectionate mind truly meditates upon God; and all thought upon that Being which is put forth merely to gratify the curiosity and pride of the human understanding forms no part of the Christian habit and practice which we are recommending. Man in every age has endeavored "by searching to find out God." He has striven almost convulsively to fathom the abyss of the Deity, and discover the deep things of the Creator. But because it was from the love of knowledge rather than from the love of God, his efforts have been both unprofitable and futile. He has not sounded the abyss, neither has his heart grown humble, and gentle, and tender, and pure. His intellect has been baffled, and, what is yet worse, his nature has not been renovated. Nay, more, a weariness and a curse has come into his spirit, because he has put the comprehension of an object in the place of the object itself; because, in his long struggle to understand God, he has not had the first thought of loving and serving him.

There is, indeed, for the created mind, no true knowledge of the Creator but a practical and sanctifying knowledge. God alone knows the speculative secrets of his own being. The moral and holy perfection's of the Godhead are enough, and more than enough, for man to meditate upon. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God," but those things said Moses to the children of Israel, "but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of his law."

True meditation, thus proceeding from filial love and sympathy, brings the soul into intercourse and communion with its object. Devout and holy reflection upon God introduces man into the divine presence, in a true and solid sense of these words. Such a soul shall know God as the natural man does not, and cannot. "Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered, and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." In the hour of spiritual and affectionate musing upon the character and attributes of God-and especially upon their manifestation in the Person and Work of Christ-there is a positive impression upon the heart, directly from God. In what other mode can we get near to the Invisible One, here upon earth, than by some mental act or process? In what other way than by prayer and meditation can we approach God? We cannot see him with the outward eye.



We cannot touch him with the hand. We cannot draw nigh to him with a body of flesh and blood. In no way, here below, can we have intercourse with God, except "in spirit." He is a pure Spirit, and that part of us which has to do with him is the spirit within us. And in this mode of existence, the only ordinary medium of communication between the divine and the human spirit is thought and prayer. God, with all the immensity of his being, and all the infinitude of his perfection's, is virtually non-existent for that man who does not meditate and who never prays. For so long as there is no medium of intercourse there is no intercourse. The power of thought and of spiritual supplication is all that God has given us in this life whereby we may approach him, and be impressed by his being and attributes. Eye bath not seen him; the ear cannot hear him. Nothing but the invisible can behold the invisible. Here upon earth, man must meet God in the depths of his soul, in the privacy of his closet, or not at all.

The Christian life is so imperfect here below; that it is unsafe to set it up as a measure of what is possible under the covenant of grace. The possibilities and capacities of the Christian religion are by no means to be estimated by the stunted draughts made upon them by our unfaithfulness and unbelief. Were we as meditative and prayerful, as was Enoch, the seventh from Adam, we like him. should "walk with God." This was the secret of the wonderful spirituality and unearthliness that led to his translation. Is there upon earth to day any communion between man and God superior to that between the patriarchal mind and the Eternal? Men tell us that the ancient church was ignorant, and that it cannot be expected that Seth and Enoch and David should be possessed of the vast intelligence of the nineteenth century. But show me the man among the millions of our restless and self-conceited civilization who walks with God as Enoch did, and who meditates upon that glorious Being all the day and in the night watches as David did-show me a man of such mental processes as these, and I will show you one whose shoe latches, even in intellectual respects, the wisest of our savannas is not worthy to stoop down and unloose. No scientific knowledge equals, either in loftiness or in depth, the immortal vision of the saint and seraphim. And were we accustomed to such heavenly contemplation and musing, the "fire would burn" in our hearts as it did in that of the Psalmist and our souls would "pant" after God. God would be real to our feelings, instead of being -a mere abstraction for our understanding. We should be conscious of his presence with distinctness equal to that with which we feel the morning wind, and should see his glory as clearly as we ever saw the sun at noonday. With as much certainty as we know the sky to be overhead, and underneath the solid ground, should we be certain that "God is, and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." There would be contact. "I want," said Niebuhr, wearied with seeking and not finding, "I want a God who is heart to my heart, spirit to my spirit, life to my life." Such is God to every soul that loves him, and meditates because it loves.

True meditation, then, being practical, and thereby bringing the subject of it into communion with the object of it, is of necessity sanctifying. For the object is Infinite Holiness and Purity. It is he in whom is centered and gathered and crowded all possible perfections. And can our minds muse upon such a Being



and not become purer and better? Can we actually and affectionately commune with the most perfect and high God in the heavens and not become sanctified? The spirit of a man takes its character from the themes of its meditation. He who thinks much upon wealth becomes avaricious; He whose thoughts are upon earthly glory becomes ambitious; and he whose thoughts are upon God becomes godlike.

**III. In the third place, meditation upon God is a blessed act of the mind, because God himself is an infinitely blessed being, and communicates of his fullness of joy to all who contemplate it.** Mere thinking, in and of itself, is not sufficient to secure happiness. Everything depends upon the quality of the thought, and this again upon the nature of the object upon which it is expended. There are various kinds and degrees of mental enjoyment, each produced by a particular species of mental reflection; but there is no thinking that gives rest and satisfaction and joy to the soul, but thinking upon the glorious and blessed God. All other thought ultimately baffles and tires us. Heaven comes into the human mind not through poetry, or philosophy, or science, or art-not through any secular knowledge but through religion. When a man thinks of his wealth, his houses, his friends, or his country, though he derives a sort of pleasure from so doing, yet it is not of such a grave and solid species as to justify its being denominated "bliss." No thought that is expended upon the creature, or upon any of the creaturely relations, can possibly produce that "sober certainty of waking bliss" which constitutes heaven. If it can, why is not man a blessed spirit here on earth? If it can, why is it that man in all his movements and strivings never reaches a final centre, at which he is willing to say to his soul: "This is enough; this is all; here stand and remain forever?" Man is constantly thinking upon the things of earth, and if they have the power to awaken calm and contented thought, and to induce a permanent and perfect joy, why is he so restless and unhappy? And why does he become the more wearied and soured, the more intensely he thinks and toils?

But there is higher and nobler thought than that of trade and politics. Man can meditate upon purely intellectual themes. He can expend intense reflection upon the mysteries and problems of his own mind, and of the Eternal Mind. He can put forth an earnest and graceful effort of his powers within the province of beautiful letters and fine art. But does even such an intellectual, and, so far as it goes, such an elevating meditation as this produce and preserve genuine tranquillity and enjoyment? Are poet and philosopher synonymous with saint and angel? Is the learned man necessarily a happy one? Look through the history of literary men, and see their anxious but baffled research, their eager but fruitless inquiry, their acute but empty speculation, their intense but vain study, and you will know that the wise man spake true when he said, "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Hear the sigh of the meditative Wordsworth:

"Me this unchartered freedom tires;  
I feel the weight of chance desires;  
My hopes no more must change their name,  
I long for a repose that ever is the same."



No, all thought, which does not ultimately come home to God in practical, filial, and sympathetic communion, is incapable of rendering the soul blest. The intellect may find a kind of pleasure in satisfying its inquisitive and

proud desire " to be as gods, knowing good and evil," but the heart experiences no peace or rest, until by a devout and religious meditation it enters into the fullness of God and shares in his eternal joy.

And here again, as in the former instance, our personal experience is so limited and meager that the language of Scripture, and of some saints on earth, seems exaggerated and rhetorical. Says the sober and sincere apostle Paul -a man too much in earnest, and too well acquainted with the subject, to overdraw and overpaint-" Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." There is a strange unearthly joy, when a pure and spiritual mind is granted a clear view of the divine perfections. It rejoices with a joy unspeakable and full of glorying. All finite beauty, all created glory, is but a shadow in comparison. The holy mind rapt in contemplation says with Augustine: 'I When I love God, I do not love the beauty of material bodies, nor the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of the light so gladsome to our eyes, nor sweet melodies of varied songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers and perfumes and spices; not manna nor honey. None of these do I love, when I love my God. And yet I love a kind of melody, a kind of fragrance, and a kind of food, when I love my God-the light, the melody, the fragrance, and the food of the inner man: when there shineth into my soul what space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breathing disperseth not, and there tasteth what eating diminisheth not. This is it which I love, when I love my God.

We find it difficult, with our sluggish and earthly temper, to believe all this, and to sympathize with it. Yet it is simple naked truth and fact. There is a heaven, whether we reach it or not. There is a beatific vision of God, whether it ever dilates and enraptures our eyes or not. God is infinite blessedness and glory, and no good being can behold him without partaking of it. As he gazes, he is changed into the same image from glory to glory. The more clear and full his vision, the more overwhelming and boundless is the influx of heaven into him. We may know something of this here on earth. The more we meditate upon God and divine things, the happier shall we become in our own minds. There are at this moment, upon this cursed and thistle-bearing earth, some meek and gentle spirits whose life of prayer and holy communion streaks the heavens with bars of amber, and apparels everything in heavenly light. And the more this divine pleasure enters the soul, the more will it hunger and thirst after it. For this is the *summum bonum*; this is the absolute delight. This never satiates. This never wearies. This joy in the vision of God has the power to freshen and invigorate while it runs through the fibres of the heart; and therefore, even amidst the most ecstatic and satisfying visions of heaven, the blessed still cry: "My soul pants after thee, O God, as the hart pants after the waterbrook; my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God."



Never will our minds reach a state in which they will really be at rest, and never will they put forth an activity, which they will be willing to have eternal, until they acquire the mental habits of the holy angels. In the saints' everlasting rest, there is an unintermittent contemplation and sight of God. Who of us is ready for it? Who of us is certain that he will not turn away, when he finds that this, and this alone, is the heaven of which he has heard so much? Who of us has such a holy frame and such a spiritual sympathy with God, that every deeper descent into that abyss of holiness and purity will reveal new sights of joy, and start out new feelings of wonder and love? Who of us can be happy in heaven? For this open vision of God, this sight of him face to face, this beatific contemplation of his perfection's, is the substance of paradise, the jasper foundation of the city of God.

We have thus seen that religious meditation upon God and divine things elevates, sanctifies, and blesses. But though this Christian habit produces such great and good fruits, there is probably no duty that is more neglected. We find it easier to read our Bible, than to ponder upon it; easier to listen to preaching, than to inwardly digest it; easier to respond to the calls of benevolence and engage in external service in the church, than to go into our closets. And is not this the secret of the faint and sickly life in our souls? Is not this the reason why we live at a poor dying rate? Think you that if we often entered into the presence of God and obtained a realizing view of things unseen and eternal, earthly temptation would have such a Think you that if we strong power over us as it does? received every day a distinct and bold impression from the attributes of God, we should be so distant from him in our hearts? Can we not trace our neglect of duty, our lukewarm feelings, and our great worldliness of heart, to our lack of the vision of God?

The success of a Christian mainly depends upon a uniform and habitual communion with his God and Redeemer. No spasmodic resolutions into which he may be exasperated by the goadings of conscience can be a substitute for it. If holy communion and prayer are interrupted, he will surely fall into sin. In this world of continual temptation and of lethargic consciences, we need to be awakened and awed by the serene splendor of God's holy countenance. But we cannot behold that amidst the vapors and smoke of every-day life. We must go into our closets and "shut the door, and pray to our Father who seeth in secret." Then shall we know how power to resist temptation comes from fellowship with God. Then we know what a Sabbath that soul enjoys, which, with open eye, looks long and steadily at the Divine perfections. With what a triumphant energy, like that of the archangel trampling on the dragon, does Moses come down from the Mount into the life of conflict and trial. With what a vehement spiritual force does a holy mind resist evil, after it has just seen the contrast between evil and God. Will the eagle that has soared above the earth in the free air of the open firmament of heaven, and has gazed into the sun with an undazzled eye, endure to sink and dwell in the dark cavern of the owl and the bat? Then will the spirit which has seen the glorious light of the divine countenance endure to descend and grovel in the darkness and shame of sin.



It should, therefore, be a diligent and habitual practice with us, to meditate upon God and divine things. Time should be carefully set apart and faithfully used for this sole purpose. It is startling to consider how much of our life passes without any thought of God; without any distinct and filial recognition of his presence and his character. And yet how much of it might be spent in sweet and profitable meditation. The avocations of our daily life do not require the whole of our mental energy and reflection. If there were a disposition; if the current of feeling and affection set in that direction; how often could the farmer commune with God in the midst of his toil, or the merchant in the very din and press of his business. How often could the artisan send his thoughts and his ejaculations upward, and the work of his hands are none the worse for it. "What hinders," says Augustine, "what hinders a servant of God while working with his hands, from meditating in the law of the Lord, and singing unto the name of the Lord most high? As for divine songs, he can easily say them even while working with his hands, and like as rowers with a boat-song, so with godly melody cheer up his very toil." But the disposition is greatly lacking. If there were an all-absorbing affection for God in our hearts, and it were deep joy to see him, would not this "sweet meditation" of the Psalmist be the pleasure of life, and all other thinking the duty-a duty performed from the necessity that attaches to this imperfect mode of existence, rather than from any keen relish for it? If the vision of God were glorious and ravishing to our minds, should we not find them often indulging themselves in the right, and would not a return to the things of earth be reluctant? Would not thought upon God steal through and suffuse all our other thinking, as sunset does the evening sky, giving a pure and saintly hue to all our feelings, and pervading our entire experience? So it works in other provinces. The poet Burns was so deeply absorbed in the visions, aspirations, and emotions of poetry, that the avocations of the farmer engrossed but little of his mind, and it has been said of him, that, though his hand was on the plough his heart was with the muse." Were the Christian as much absorbed in the visions, aspirations, and emotions of religion, it would be said of him, too: "His hand is on the plough, but his heart is with his God; his head is in his worldly business, but his heart is with his God."

Finally, let us be urged up to the practice of this duty by a consideration which has most force, it is true, for unrenewed men who know nothing of the Christian experience, but which still has much strength for us if we consider our remaining sin and the slender amount of our intercourse with God. We still find it too difficult to delight in God. It is still not so easy and pleasant as it ought to be to walk with God. Notwithstanding our vocation and our expectation, it is still too difficult for us to be happy in heaven. It is in this reference that the subject we have been considering speaks with great emphasis. Let us remember that a foundation for heaven in our own minds is requisite in order to the enjoyment of the heaven that is on high.' That rational being who does not practise the meditations and enjoy the experiences of heaven, will not be at home there, and, therefore, will not go there. Every being goes to his own place." Is it supposable that a soul that never here on earth contemplated the Divine character with pleasure, will see that character in eternity, in peace, and joy? Is it supposable that a human spirit filled with self-seeking and worldliness, and wholly destitute of devout and



adoring meditations, will be taken among seraphim and cherubim when taken out of time? Is that world of holy contemplation the proper place for a carnal mind filled through and through with only earthly and selfish thoughts? Can the sensual Dives be happy in the bosom of Abraham? God is not mocked, neither can a man cheat and impose upon his own soul when in eternity. Every one will then be brought to his individuality. He will know then, if not before, what he does really love and what he does really loathe. And if in that other world there be only a pretended and hollow affection for God, with what a sigh and long-drawn moan will the wretched being fling down the harp with which he vainly tries to sing the heavenly song. For whatsoever a man thinks of with most relish here in time, he shall think of with most relish in eternity. He who loves to think of wealth, and fame, and sensual pleasure, and loathes to think of God, and Christ, and heavenly objects, shall think of wealth, and fame, and sensual pleasure in eternity, where all such thinking is " the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched." But he who, in any degree, loves to think of God and Christ, and abhors to think of sin in all its forms, shall think of God and Christ in eternity-where all such thought is music, and peace, and rest.

The destination of every man in another world may be inferred and known from the general tenor of his thoughts in this. He who does not love to think upon a particular class of subjects here will not love to think upon them there. The mere passage from time to eternity can no more alter a man's likes or dislikes in this respect than the passage of the Atlantic can alter them. And that rational spirit, be it human, angelic, or arch-angelic, which in eternity cannot take positive delight in contemplating God, but recoils from all such contemplation, is miserable and lost, though it tread the golden streets and hear the rippling murmurs of the river of the water of life. But if our meditation upon God is sweet here, it will be sweeter in eternity. And then our blessedness will be certain and secure; for no spirit, human, angelic, or arch-angelic, can by any possibility be made unblest in any part of God's vast dominions, if it really finds joy in the contemplation of the ever-present God. Amen