

*Preaching and Preachers*

where science seems to come into conflict with faith and with the teaching of the Scriptures. All these matters have to be considered. Then, of course, there is psychology and its particularly subtle attacks on the Faith.

Now no one man can be expert on everything; but he has to try to keep up to date and abreast of all this as best he can. So he must read about these matters so that he may know what is happening. So far I have been thinking mainly in terms of books. But in addition there are the journals and periodicals, not only those that belong to one's own denomination, but others that are relevant to the work, and especially in these ecumenical days. All this is necessary to help the preacher to make an assessment of the people who are going to listen to him. He must know something about their background and their outlook, and what they are thinking, and what they are reading, and the influences that are being brought to bear upon them. People in their innocence and ignorance are still ready to listen to plausible speakers and to believe anything they read in a newspaper or popular journal, and it is our business to help them and to protect them. We are shepherds, we are pastors, and we are to look after and care for these people who have been committed to our charge. It is our business therefore to equip ourselves for that great task.

Before I go on to other types of reading I would emphasise strongly the all-importance of maintaining a balance in your reading. I cannot stress this too much. Because of our natural differences we all have our prejudices and preferences, so there is the type of man who spends the whole of his time reading theology, another reading philosophy, another psychology; they tend to read practically nothing else. This is really dangerous, and the way to counteract it is to prescribe balanced reading for yourself. What I mean is this. Read theology, as I say, but always balance it, not only with Church history but with biographies and the more devotional type of reading. Let me explain why this is so important. You are preparing yourself, remember, and the danger for the intellectual type of man, if he is only reading theology or philosophy, is to become puffed up. He persuades himself that

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he has a perfect system; there is no problem, there is no difficulty. But he will soon discover that there are problems and difficulties; and if he wants to avoid shipwreck, the best thing he can do when he feels that he knows all, and is elated and tempted to intellectual pride, is to pick up say the Journals of George Whitefield. There he will read of how that man was used of God in England, Wales, Scotland and America, and also of his experiences of the love of Christ; and if he does not soon feel that he is but a worm, well then I suggest that he has never been regenerated. We continually need to be humbled. That is why balanced reading is an absolute essential. If your heart is not as much engaged as your head in these matters, your theology is defective—apart from anything else. There is this real danger of becoming over-theoretical, over-academic, over-objective, over-intellectual. That will mean not only that you are in a dangerous spiritual state yourself, but also that to that extent you will be a poor preacher and a poor pastor. You will not help your people and you will be failing at the task to which you are called.

The way to counteract, and to safeguard yourself against that, is to balance your reading. Never fail to do so. I maintain that one should always be reading along these differing lines daily. I have developed a sort of routine which I think is sound and profitable almost from the physical standpoint as well as the other. If I am reading the stiffer and the more difficult books, or the more directly theological books in the morning, I read the other types at night. It is good that the mind should not be too much exercised or stimulated before you go to bed, if you want to avoid the problem of insomnia. It does not matter so much when you are young—at that stage you can do almost anything you like and still sleep—but as you get older you will find that it is not quite so easy. I have often had to say that to men who have been in trouble nervously, and on the verge of a breakdown. It has been obvious to me from listening to their stories that they were in the habit of reading really difficult matter which called out all their reserves of mental ability right up until they retired to bed; and then they were surprised when their minds refused to stop working,