

It will probably only produce the heartless reply—"How forcible are right words! but what doth your arguing reprove?"¹ This palatable ministry, that blunts the edge of "the sword of the Spirit," in order to avoid the reproach of the cross, brings upon the preacher a most tremendous responsibility.

Personal application formed the nerve of the preaching of the Jewish prophets,² and of our Lord's public and individual addresses. His reproofs to the Scribes and Pharisees, to the Sadducees and Herodians, had distinct reference to their particular sins.³ In his treatment of the young ruler,⁴ and the woman of Samaria,⁵ he avoided general remark, to point his instructions to their besetting and indulged sin—"talking to their thoughts" (as a sensible writer has observed in the case of the young man) 'as we do to each other's words.'⁶ Peter's hearers "were pricked to the heart" by his applicatory address.⁷ Even the hardest heart—the most stubborn sinner—is made to smart under the point of the two-edged sword.⁸

Nothing of this kind is found in the instructions of the heathen sages. Plato, Aristotle, and Tully, dealt out to their disciples cold and indefinite descriptions of certain virtues and vices; but with no endeavours to impress the mind with personal conviction. Horace and Juvenal attempted something in this way; but in a spirit more likely to excite ridicule and disgust, than to produce any practical result. Their system was a mass of inert matter, without action. Such probably also were the instructions of the Jewish teachers—consisting chiefly (as the Evangelist implies) of spiritless disputations, drawn from the traditions of men, with no power to work upon the mind, affections, or conscience.⁹

Preaching, in order to be effective, must be reduced from vague generalities, to a tangible, individual character—coming home to every man's business, and even to his bosom. He goes on in a slumbering routine of customary attendance. Nothing

¹ Job vi. 25. It was observed of Philip Henry, that 'he did not shoot the arrow of the word *over the heads* of his audience, in the flourishes of affected rhetoric, nor *under their feet* by homely expressions, but *to their hearts in close and lively application.*' *Life*, p. 59. ² Isaiah lviii. 1. Micah iii. 8. ³ Comp. Matt. xxii. xxiii.

⁴ Matt. xix. 16–22.

⁵ John iv. 7–26. Comp. Bishop of Winchester's *Min. Char. of Christ*, ch. 13.

⁶ Benson's *Life of Christ*, p. 300.

⁷ Acts ii. 22–37.

⁸ 1 Kings xvi. 20. xxii. 8. Amos vii. 9. Luke iv. 28. Acts v. 33. Rev. xi. 10.

⁹ Matt. vii. 29, with Mark vii. 1–9.