

13: *The Preacher's Interest in His Immediate Subject*

Where everything on the part of the preacher is made subservient to the duties of the pulpit, he will be very apt to feel an interest in the work which is more immediately before him. An able advocate at the bar, not only feels an interest in the law, as a profession, and makes every thing subordinate to his professional advancement; he feels a special interest in his client and in his cause. A good physician not only feels an interest in the science of medicine; he feels a deep and absorbing interest in his patient, and in the specific disease which is under his treatment. So, to give the pulpit its appropriate power, it is necessary, that the preacher possess a *deep interest in the subject of every particular discourse*. I do not mean by this, a general interest in the great object of preaching the Gospel; of this I have already spoken; but a special interest in the *subject itself* which forms the theme of the discourse which he is actually uttering.

The subjects which form the themes of discourse from the Christian pulpit are in themselves *capable* of producing and sustaining a very high degree of interest in the mind of the preacher. We have before referred to them; nor are there to be found topics of thought **within the wide range over which the human mind expatiates, to be compared with these.** The highest intensity of feeling ever brought to the truth of God falls below the great and exciting theme. Whatever is lucid in statement, vivid or great in conception, powerful in argument, accurate in discrimination; in a word, all that is concentrated or discursive, which the preacher himself is able to command, may be employed and exhausted on the great and varied subjects with which his mind is officially familiar. There is no vigour of thought, and no tenderness of heart and feeling, however elevated, subdued or subduing, but here finds an appropriate place. Every passion of the human mind may here be expressed, from the more tranquil to the more

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agitated; from the tears of compassion and grief, to the thrilling emotions of joy and triumph; from hallowed indignation to transporting complacency. It is not possible to feel too deeply, too intensely on such themes. Moses, when he came down from the mount, with his face radiant, and shining from the power of sacred thought and sentiment, and Paul in the third heavens, were but exemplifications of that state of mind which the truth of God is capable of producing, even in creatures whose 'foundation is in the dust, and who dwell in houses of clay'. It is one of the great peculiarities of God's truth, that the most vigorous and sensitive minds never become weary in contemplating it, except from their own infirmity. The more and the longer they pursue these mighty thoughts, and the more labour they devote to the pursuit, the greater the interest, the freshness, with which the pursuit is conducted. Angels stoop down to look into these things; their mighty minds cannot fully grasp them; they are amazed and confounded before them, and in the contemplation of them, cover their faces with their wings.

It is not so with error: error, in the course of a few years, becomes tame and spiritless. Enterprising minds become weary of it, and after a few bold and strong efforts are very apt to abandon the appropriate duties of the pulpit, if not the pulpit itself, for other employments that are more congenial to their high intellectual impulses. The reason why the enterprising mind of such a man as Dr. Priestley employed itself so extensively on subjects foreign to Christianity, no doubt was, that he did not find enough in the meagre and bald Christianity of which he was the advocate, to interest his own masculine thoughts and emotions. If the true secret were known, this would probably be found to be the reason why not a few of the most accomplished men of the Unitarian School, in our own land, have sickened of their work, and directed their thoughts to more exciting scenes and labours.

The preacher's subject is never a bad one, so long as it is taken from the Bible. All that is necessary to give the more, or the most trivial, sufficient interest, is to make it the matter of sufficiently thorough inquiry. Be the theme what it may that is selected from this inexhaustible treasure-house of thought, there is not one among them all but is capable of imparting deep interest to the mind of the preacher; while the more important impart to it an

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