

ARTICLE VII.

THE USE OF MOTIVES IN PREACHING.

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THE great problem which confronts the preacher is how to make bad men good and good men better. He looks out over his pulpit and sees before him human beings in a certain frame of mind, with certain beliefs and controlling purposes. He desires to produce in these human beings a certain other frame of mind with different beliefs and purposes. The query is, How shall the change be secured? It is to the study of this question that his life is devoted.

It seems evident that the pastor who would be successful in prosecuting this study must have a reasonably clear conception of three things: (1) The existing state of his parishioner's mind and heart in each case. This is not the work of a moment. It sometimes requires months or years to get possession of the previous connections and family history which indicate the real attitude of the man whose case is under consideration. (2) The state of mind and heart required. There must be nothing hazy in the pastor's conception of what it is to be a Christian. (3) The means to be employed in securing the passage from the given to the required moral state. These statements seem to be almost truisms, but there are many things in the machinery of modern church organization which tend to obscure them. It is to the last of these three that special attention will be given in this article—the means to be employed in producing changes in moral character.

We suppose moral character to consist in choices and the result of these choices upon the entire personality.

The only way to influence choices is to present motives; so that this part of the preacher's study consists in a consideration of what motives are best adapted to produce a desired choice, and the best method of presenting them. It is, of course, understood that this conception of character as being influenced by the human presentation of motives, in no sense eliminates the work of the Holy Spirit. No presentation of truth moves the unregenerate heart to right choices without his influence; but he has chosen to respect the nature of the human mind, and work upon it through motives. Upon some proper knowledge of motives and how to use them depends the preacher's ability to co-operate with the Spirit of God.

Perhaps there is sometimes a tendency to underestimate the importance of a skilful use of motives in influencing human conduct, and to displace it by vigorous, direct exhortation. When a shrewd man desires to influence men to action he first presents a motive, and waits for it to accomplish its result. If it fails, he tries another; and if he finds no motive which will lead to the desired choice, he spends very little time in direct exhortation. The proper place for eloquence, illustration, and ingenious rhetorical expression seems to be in the presentation of motives, rather than direct appeal. A study of the Pentecostal sermon reveals the fact that the excited outburst from the audience, "Men and Brethren, what shall we do?" was the result of a vigorous, skilful presentation of motives; and it was not until the motives had begun to produce their legitimate result, that the preacher exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation."

Since, then, so much depends upon a skilful use of motives, how shall the preacher determine what motives to use? Doubtless there are various sources of information such as a careful study of the motives in view of which he finds himself acting or a close observation of his fellow-men in history and everyday life. There is, however, one pre-eminently conspicuous source which will give direc-

tion to the farther thought of this article. It is the word of God. Here God himself solves the great problem which confronts every one of his preachers. He has before him a world made up of unregenerate hearts and imperfectly developed Christian characters. He desires to produce a different moral state and in his word we find him using just the motives which are best calculated to produce the change. He made the heart of man and he knows just what motives to employ in order to produce in it desired results.

What motives does the divine Intelligence bring to bear upon the unregenerate man?

In the first place, the Bible presents constantly a line of truth which is to be intellectually apprehended. It teaches that all men are sinners; that they are so fixed in sin that they will not quit it without the persuasive influences of the Holy Spirit; that all sinners are condemned to everlasting punishment; that the Son of God came into the world, lived, died, rose from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God; that because of this life and death and resurrection, any sinner who exercises faith in Jesus Christ will be saved, adopted into the family of God, and be sanctified through the Spirit and word of God. With this system of great facts to be intellectually apprehended, the Scripture appeals to the reason of men. The great sermons of Acts are distinctively doctrinal sermons and reiterate constantly the one line of doctrine which filled the mind of the early church. He who would move men to the desired choice must get a firm grip on these great doctrines of Scripture and be able to teach them to others out of his own experience as well as out of the Book.

ous. These great facts which are simply objective motives, they so state and restate in parable and illustration as to arouse emotions which shall be subjective motives resulting in the desired moral action.

What are the emotions which the Scripture seeks to arouse by the use of these great doctrinal truths? In the first place, it presents certain of them in such a way as to arouse the fears of the human heart. There is a certain false sentimentality abroad which deprecates any effort to make men act from a sense of fear. Fear is supposed to be a low motive and to have no large place among the antecedents of that choice which constitutes virtuous character. We may induce men to hope; we may appeal to their desires for the glorious and the noble but we must not let them be moved out of their present position by the fear of disastrous consequences which may result from remaining in it. The inspired writers do not seem to share this sentiment but appeal very freely to the fears of men as motives to right action. They seem to produce this fear in two ways,—by the charge of specific sins, and by a vivid portrayal of the punishment of sin.

This is conspicuously evident in the preaching of that great mover of men, John the Baptist. He has his immense, heterogeneous audience before him in the Jordan valley. He apprehends clearly the action he desires every man in it to take. He wants each man of them to *repent*. In order to produce this result he strikes squarely at the actual prevailing sins of the different classes of his audience. There is the haughty, self-righteous Pharisee trusting in his Abrahamic descent for salvation but without any of Abraham's righteous faith. The preacher's words startle him. "Begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." He sees a group of dishonest, unscrupulous tax-collectors and says to them, "Extort no more than is appointed you." The brutal, mutinous sol-

diers hear him say, "Do violence to no man, neither exact anything wrongfully and be content with your wages." Coupled with the charge of specific sins is a most vivid, ingeniously rhetorical presentation of the punishment which is surely to fall upon him who will not repent of his sins. He draws a picture of the unfruitful tree. The owner stands by it; he has dug away the earth until the roots are exposed; the edge of his ax already touches them. "Even now is the ax laid unto the root of the tree; every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, therefore, is hewn down and cast into the fire." He draws another startling picture of the Coming One standing, like a farmer, by his threshing floor, fan in hand, all ready to separate wheat from chaff, to gather up the one and to burn the other. That is, this great preacher, in solving the problem before him, makes use of two important doctrines, the sinfulness of the human heart and the punishment of sin; but instead of stating them abstractly, he makes his audience feel the first by pointing out specific sins and the second by vivid, homely illustration. He employs them to arouse the fear of his audience and this fear he uses as one of the motives calculated to secure the repentance which he desires.

The Pentecostal sermon presents the same direct charge of sin and seeks to alarm the sinner by representing that his sin throws him into an open contest with God himself. Within two months after the execution of Jesus, Peter boldly charges his audience with murder. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God,—*ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay.*" "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus *whom ye crucified.*" They hated him: God approved him. They killed him: God raised him up. They have killed their Messiah, but

possible consequences, it is not strange that the vast audience were "pricked in their hearts" and prepared for repentance.

The teaching of Jesus Christ himself is remarkable for the vividness with which it makes this great doctrine of the punishment of sin appeal to the fears of men. He represents the unrepentant soul as an offender in the hands of his accuser being hurried along the street to the magistrate and to jail and urges to instant repentance. "On the way give diligence to be quit of him, lest haply he hale thee to the judge and the judge shall deliver thee to the officer and the officer shall cast thee into prison." Much of his parabolic teaching bears the same characteristic. He represents the unprepared as shut out from the joyous light of the wedding feast, wailing in the darkness; lost souls going away with weeping and gnashing of teeth; the unrepentant, suffering something which is like the gnawing of a deathless worm or the burning of an unquenchable fire. He who reads through the Gospel of Matthew with this thought in view, will be impressed by the persistency with which the Saviour seems determined to startle men out of their natural apathy by a vivid portrayal of the punishment of sin.

The Scripture, then, repeatedly employs these two great truths, the sinfulness of the human heart and the punishment of sin, in an appeal to the fears of men designed to secure a right moral choice. It would seem that the preacher who is successful in any high degree, must do the same; but two provisos need to be added almost in the same breath. The first is that this motive is seldom used in Scripture by itself; of this we take special notice later. The other is that no preacher can

ously noticeable in the biblical examples already cited. John the Baptist was "filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb." Jesus Christ received the Spirit without measure. The disciples were kept waiting in Jerusalem, and were not allowed to make the awful charge of murdering the Son of God until they had received the gracious baptism of the Holy Ghost. The preacher of to-day requires a similar preparation. He has the same work to do and is responsible for being in such a spiritual condition as will enable him to speak of the particular sins which his congregation are committing and of their punishment, with yearning love. Such preaching will save many as it always has. It will also offend some, for all true preaching makes some men better and others worse. The same truths which saved three thousand men on the day of Pentecost served only to harden and embitter the committee of the Sanhedrin which attempted to stop the apostolic work. The saving truths which many heard gladly from the lips of the Lord, increased the bitter hatred of the Pharisees until they were ready to stone him; but he preached them just the same. It is the nature of the truth to divide men into two sharply defined classes, the one of which it makes better, the other, worse.

There seems to be to-day in many quarters an aversion to speaking plainly and repeatedly about God's treatment of the persistently unrepentant sinner. Sometimes the opinion is openly expressed that it will not do to preach the sterner truths of God's word in the present generation. The fear of punishment is regarded by others as a low motive which should not be much used in leading men to seek salvation. There is a great deal said about

in the natural consequences of sin. There seems to be an anxiety, which is nowhere exhibited in Scripture, to clear God from the imputation of actively and directly laying his hand upon the sinner in punishment. In the case of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, which seems intended to show how God deals with the persistently impenitent sinner, the terrible feature is that Jehovah himself is represented as the unseen but almighty Antagonist. "It came to pass at midnight that Jehovah smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt."¹ "And Jehovah overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the Red Sea."² After Isaiah has described with great pathos God's tenderness and patience in redeeming and caring for his people all the days of old, he says that there came a time when because of their rebellion, "He was turned to be their enemy and himself fought against them."³ In general the language of Scripture descriptive of punishment, seems intended to make the impression, which many are anxious to prevent, that there comes a time when the infinite wrath of God is visited directly and personally upon the persistently impenitent sinner. The fearfulness of falling into the hands of the living God is distinctly urged as a warning against apostasy.⁴ It is by no means to be maintained that the preacher should always be talking about the punishment of sin any more than about any other one truth. In some cases it has probably received a disproportionate emphasis. It is merely maintained that the preacher should give it just such prominence in his preaching as God gives it in his word. His preaching during the years of his pastorate should make as nearly as possible the same impression which a long, faithful study of the Scripture would make. That symmetrical presentation of truth observed in Scripture should be reproduced in his preaching.

Almost constantly associated in the Scriptures with this appeal to fear is the appeal to another motive to which

¹ Ex. xii. 29.² Ex. xiv. 19.³ Isa. lxiii. 10.⁴ Heb. x. 26-31.

the human heart in all ages has been wont to respond, and that is, hope. When a man sees nothing but a dreadful doom before him, fear soon becomes despair and produces apathy instead of action. That sovereign who never does anything but punish is not feared by his subjects but is regarded by them with fearless, despairing hatred. The Psalmist says of Jehovah, "There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared."¹ When man's fears have been awakened by the prospect of the sinner's certain fearful doom, the gospel comes to him with a message of hope. The two motives, hope and fear, play into each other and neither can do its appropriate work except in connection with the other. Fear is of no value except when there is hope of escape from the thing feared, and hope is effective only when fear, or at least dissatisfaction, has been first aroused. The gospel always presents the two motives together. In close connection with the description of the Baptist's searching charges of specific sins and vivid portrayal of punishment stands the statement that "with many other exhortations also preached he good tidings unto the people."² The deep sense of guilt which the plain truths of the Pentecostal sermon produced is met instantly by a large promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Ghost, which promise is, "to you and to your children and to all that are afar off." The inspired writers seem endeavoring to produce a sense of fearful, imminent danger and to show one sure way of escape. In this case, as in the one previously considered, it is the great doctrines of revelation which are presented with such variety of illustration and rhetorical device as to make them appeal forcibly to the emotional nature. These doctrines are the truths connected with the life and mission of Jesus Christ and the blessedness which is promised to the sinner from an alliance with Jesus Christ by faith. It is of very little use to present Jesus Christ as a Saviour or the blessedness which results from an alliance with him until

¹ cxxx. 4.² Luke iii. 18. R. V.

men have been made to feel their need of a Saviour and to feel a desire for such blessedness. We are in too much of a hurry sometimes to show certain individuals the great hope with which the gospel abounds. In the two most conspicuous instances of the Saviour's dealing with individual cases, his method of procedure in this respect is worthy of notice. In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, his first effort, after having established a relationship by asking a favor, was to create within her a sense of need. He tried to make her feel her need of something which would eternally satisfy the thirst of her spiritual nature. When this apparently failed he laid his hand upon the open sore of her life, charged her with the specific sin of living with a man who was not her husband, and under this touch she was aroused. She began to feel something akin to fear. Conscience began to accuse her and under the spur of an awakened conscience, she followed him rapidly to the point where she expressed her need of the coming Messiah. Then at the last but supreme moment he looked into her eyes and said, "I that speak unto thee am he." To have introduced himself at the beginning of the conversation would probably have produced an undesirable result or none at all. The same method of procedure is evident in the conversation with Nicodemus. His first effort was to create in the dignified, fair-minded rabbi a sense of need and fear. The great hope of the rabbi's life was to enter the kingdom of God when that long expected blessedness should arrive; but he is met at the threshold of the interview with the startling information that if the kingdom were at that moment to appear he might not enter it, that "except a man be born anew he cannot enter the kingdom of God." He becomes uneasy and is at a loss to know what such language means, but the young Teacher proceeds again to assure him that one of the simplest principles of the kingdom is that a man must be born again before he can enter it. The rabbi is candid enough to confess his ignorance,

and the Saviour proceeds to follow up his advantage by throwing him into guilty confusion at this unexpected revelation of his ignorant inefficiency. "Art thou the teacher of Israel and knowest not these things?" But now when this sense of guilt and need is awakened, what a wealth of saving hope-inspiring truth he pours out upon him! The rabbi is now prepared to appreciate a view of the slain Lamb of God and his redemptive work. With kindling earnestness, the young Teacher speaks to that receptive heart these wondrous words which have rung in the ears of men ever since: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." With consummate skill the appeal of Scripture is repeatedly made to these two mighty emotions of the human heart. It so presents one great set of facts as to arouse fear, and another great set of facts or doctrines to arouse hope. The hearts of men do not change from generation to generation, and the preacher has before him each week men and women who can be moved to right action by the same motives to which their fathers responded. They will fear and hope for the same things which stirred the hearts of their ancestors. The propriety of appealing to these two great motives is perhaps doubted by some because they seem purely selfish, while the action which we seek to secure is one of disinterested benevolence. We desire to have men repent of sin, and in an act of faith put themselves under the control of Jesus Christ as a Saviour regardless of those consequences which affect themselves only. In more philosophical language we wish them to

do in some way tend to produce this disinterested benevolence. The fact seems to be that the soul is so constituted that when aroused by that fear and inspired by that hope which an acquaintance with the facts in the case produces, it goes on more or less consciously to make an unselfish surrender of itself to God. There probably are motives which are in a sense higher than fear and hope; but the ordinary unregenerate heart is too depraved to respond to them readily. Those who object to appeals to these great fundamental emotions of the heart are generally those who greatly overestimate the excellence of depraved human nature. But whatever may be their reasons for disliking the employment of these motives, the fact remains that the Scripture does employ them very vigorously, and that practically they do prepare the soul to respond to higher motives. Even after the soul has begun to respond to higher motives, these great motives which first incited to action have a place in the development of moral character. Perhaps the soul never outgrows a wholesome fear of the consequences of offending God. When the glorious visions of Isaiah drew near their close and he had already pictured the holiness of the restored Jerusalem, his last words recur to the condition of the lost and its influence upon the righteous. "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord, and they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."¹

When the soul has by an act of faith in Jesus Christ, passed from death into life, there is a new range of motives to which appeal can be made. When a man realizes in any adequate degree what he has been saved from and what he has been saved to, by Jesus Christ, an appeal may

¹ Isa. lxvi. 23-24.

be effectively made to his sense of gratitude. In endeavoring to maintain that life of steady self-sacrificing service which is demanded of every Christian, the Scripture appeals freely to the grateful love which men have for their Rescuer. When the Lord was nerving Peter for his life of self-sacrificing service, he asked him three times, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?"¹ Paul recognized the force of this motive in his own life in saying to the Corinthians that it is "for Jesus' sake"² that we are your servants and that we which live are always delivered unto death "for Jesus' sake."³ The greatest inspiration for self-sacrifice seems to come not so much from a view of the world's needs as from the example of Christ and the saved man's grateful affection for him.

As men see a little of what is involved in adoption into the family of God, a new motive for the achievement of holiness is afforded to the preacher. "Beloved," he may say, "now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. We know that if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope set upon him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."⁴

All this new range of motives the preacher studies and experiments with, seeking in each case to find the existing state of the church or individual, and using those motives which seem most likely to secure the desired action. In his pastoral experience he will find very few, if any cases, which do not in principle have their parallels in Scripture and for which the Scripture will not suggest to him the proper motives. Perhaps he finds in his church two men who have had trouble and neither one of whom will forgive the other. What motives shall he employ to secure a change from the given to the desired state of mind? He often presents weak and ineffective reasons for reconciliation, but exactly such a case is dealt with in Scripture, and the really effective motives are suggested. Some of them

¹ John xxi. 17. ² 2 Cor. iv. 5. ³ 2 Cor. iv. 11. ⁴ 1 John iii. 2-3.

are very skilfully presented in the graphic account of the unforgiving servant whose lord delivered him to the tormentors, ending with the solemn warning: "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."¹ The two great motives presented in this appeal generally secure the desired results.

Perhaps he desires to take up a collection for some benevolent purpose, in which case he will find it interesting and very helpful to study the variety of motives which the inspired apostle employed in the eighth and ninth chapters of his second letter to the Corinthians when he was collecting money for the needy saints in Jerusalem.

Other illustrations might be cited; but enough has been said to answer the purpose of this article, which is simply to emphasize the fact that the preacher has before him a great and definite problem in moral character; given moral beings in a certain state of mind and heart, required a certain other state of mind and heart; that this change is produced, so far as the preacher is concerned, by the presentation in the power of the Holy Ghost, of the proper motives; that a faithful and lifelong study of the Bible will reveal the motives which are effective and the best methods of presenting them.

¹ Matt. xviii. 23-35.