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There is no situation in which we are placed, no demand that arises, for which Scripture as the deposit of the manifold wisdom of God is not adequate and sufficient.

JOHN MURRAY

The Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures will expect obedience to the Scriptures, and if we do not give that obedience we will quench him.

A. W. TOZER

Only one means and one way of cure has been given us and that is the teaching of the Word . . . without it nothing else will avail.

CHRYSOSTOM

We must not . . . view the Bible merely as a record of what God has done but actually as a part of the saving process.

DON GARLINGTON

The true Christian Church is the work of the Word communicated by every available means.

MARTIN LUTHER

## THE SECRET OF PREACHING: WISE COUNSEL FROM "OLD PRINCETON"

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*Zachary Eswine*

Fear none of us apprehend as we ought to do, the value of a preacher's office. Our young men do not gird themselves for it with the spirit of those who are on the eve of a great conflict, . . . nor do they prepare as those who are to lay hands upon the springs of the mightiest passions, and stir up to their depths the ocean of human feelings. Where this estimate of the work prevails, men of inferior training accomplish much.<sup>1</sup>

These words from J. W. Alexander thunder a passionate view of the preacher and his preaching. They demonstrate in seed form the view of preaching held by the men of Old Princeton. In their counsel the modern preacher can begin to discover the secret of preaching. And, therefore, he can begin to discover the secret of a ministry endowed with Gospel power, the power that God has mercifully affirmed with reviving touches among his people at various times in our history.

This article is an attempt to understand the view held by Old Princeton of the preacher and his preaching. It is an attempt to give ear to their wise counsel so that the modern preacher might be helped as he considers what preaching is and of what his life's labor of preaching will consist. The four voices we will hear are those of Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, Charles Hodge, and J. W. Alexander.

By "Old Princeton" I refer to that way of faith and life which was demonstrated at the founding of Princeton The-

ological Seminary (in 1812) and was maintained, at least formally, until the departure of J. Gresham Machen in 1929. With these definitions clarified, and his modern difficulties before him, let the preacher now endeavor to learn from the wise counsel of Old Princeton.

### THE SECRET OF PREACHING: INWARD HEAT

In order to recognize the secret of preaching, one must first understand what preaching is. In short, the Old Princeton divines agreed that "preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire." Preaching does not begin with the study of homiletics. Preaching begins with the study of the man who will preach. The preacher must be a man who is essentially "on fire."<sup>2</sup> J. W. Alexander declares that "we have loud and vehement, we have smooth and graceful, we have splendid and elaborate preaching, but very little that is earnest. One man who so feels for the souls of his hearers as to be ready to weep over them—will assuredly make himself felt."<sup>3</sup> Alexander continues: "No man can be a great preacher without great feeling."<sup>4</sup>

One must not misunderstand what Alexander is saying. Passion is not to be confused with mere animation in the pulpit. On the contrary,

Where there is more voice, more emphasis, or more gesture than there is feeling, there is waste and worse. . . . Feeling is the prime mover in eloquence; but feeling cannot be produced to order. To exhort a young man to be more animated, is to mislead and perhaps spoil him, unless you mean to inculcate the cultivation of inward emotion. It is better therefore to let nature work, even though for a time the delivery is tame, than to generate a manner only rhetorically and artificially warm which is hypocrisy.<sup>5</sup>

What Alexander describes as mere rhetorical excite-

ment is what he calls "stage-heat."<sup>6</sup> This is nothing more than the "tones of mock passions."<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the preacher seeks that genuine outworking of continual devotional preparation called "inward heat."<sup>8</sup> The fire of a preacher therefore, must be kindled from within.

The result is that the word "felt" is essential to Old Princeton preaching. But contrary to what one might think when hearing of "emotional" preaching, the "felt" sermons of Old Princeton were doctrinal sermons. Sermons were to be "discussions of some important point of doctrine . . . treat [ing] doctrines practically and experience argumentatively."<sup>9</sup> In a sermon titled "Ministerial Responsibility," Charles Hodge declares that preachers "may exhort or excite, but if they fail to teach, they are unfaithful to their great vocation. As the truth is essential to holiness, the responsibility of ministers in regard to it is exceeding great."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the preacher's inward heat is a genuine pathos in the pulpit, resulting from the apprehension and application of the doctrine preached in the preacher's own soul. Preaching is what takes place when God's preacher experiences the doctrine he is proclaiming in the presence of those listening; such that the preacher and the congregation are moved to gaze at the glory of the living God in Christ in a "felt" manner.

Jonathan Edwards once captured this definition of preaching using the terms "light and heat" in his sermon "The True Excellency of a Gospel Minister." Referring to John 5:35—that John the Baptizer was a burning and shining light—Edwards asserts that the Gospel minister must possess both light and heat.

He was a light to the church of Israel to reveal the mind and will of God to them . . . to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high

hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And he was a burning light, as he was full of a spirit of fervent piety and holiness, being filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb, having his heart warmed and inflamed with a great love to Christ.<sup>11</sup>

In this way, the Gospel preacher, like his preaching, must be as a light, which both shines and burns. In a sermon titled "Woe Is unto Me if I Preach Not the Gospel," Charles Hodge calls the Gospel minister to the centrality of preaching and exemplifies the inward heat. Hodge proclaims:

Let this then be graven on the palms of your hands. You must preach. You cannot turn back; you cannot turn aside to any other work; you cannot rightfully engage in anything which does not sub serve the preaching of the Gospel. The reason for which woe is denounced on ministers who fail to preach the Gospel is that men cannot be saved without it. All men are exposed to eternal death. There is but one way of deliverance from that death, and woe to him who, although officially called and dedicated to the work, fails to make that way known. If any man know of a certain preventive of or specific for the cholera, which now threatens our land, he would be a murderer if he did not make it known. So the blood of souls, the Scriptures assure us, will be required of those watchmen who fail to warn their fellowmen of their danger. It will not be a cold, heartless, perfunctory performance of this duty, which will satisfy conscience, clear our skirts, or secure the approbation of God. Our preaching must be earnest, assiduous, instructive and pointed or personal.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, in a sermon titled "Preaching Christ," Hodge makes the application: "Therefore brethren as ye go hence,

go to preach Christ. Let that be your theme and that your object. If faithful you will receive a crown of righteousness. If unfaithful, it would have been better had you never been born."<sup>13</sup>

"Theology on fire" not only characterized the teaching of Old Princeton about preaching, but "light and heat" also describe the actual preaching of the Old Princeton divines. The preaching of Archibald Alexander, for example, was said to be so "vivacious, and so earnest . . . he possessed the capacity of exciting religious emotion in a most remarkable degree . . . and a facility with which he could awaken emotions."<sup>14</sup> Yet such sermons "contain more theology than his modest claim to simple preaching would lead one to expect."<sup>15</sup> "Dr. Alexander never aimed to excite mere animal feelings. The effects produced were the result of Bible facts and truths, clearly presented by one who believed them, and felt their power."<sup>16</sup> Dr. Miller's

. . . attitudes in the pulpit were extremely dignified, though perhaps somewhat precise. . . . His utterance was deliberate . . . marked by an evident sincerity and solemnity that were well fitted to make an impression. . . . Still he could not be considered an impassioned preacher.<sup>17</sup>

Sprague once said of Miller, "There was nothing that could be called specially imposing in his general style of delivery; and yet I have heard him utter single sentences with as much effect as almost any other man."<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, "the whole demeanor of Dr. Miller . . . in the pulpit . . . showed that he acted habitually under a feeling of the divine presence."<sup>19</sup>

From the stylistic contrast of Alexander and Miller, the preacher is reminded that inward heat transcends homiletic presentation. Preaching must be defined as a doctrinal sermon flowing out of the preacher's personal experience

of that doctrine. The result is that light is given to God's people from the inward heat of God's work upon God's preacher. In this way, the Old Princeton preacher echoes the declaration of the Psalmist, "the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart" (Psalm 19:8).

We may summarize the point that preaching is "theology coming through a man who is on fire" with Alexander's words: "Passion is eloquence. . . . The whole mass of truth by the sudden passion of the speaker is made red hot and burns its way."<sup>20</sup>

With this definition of preaching, the preacher must recognize the temptation to find heat from places other than the application of theology upon his soul. Likewise, he must come to the conviction that it is doctrine aflame that will make the minds and hearts of his congregation rich toward God. The preacher must come to the understanding, therefore, that he may give a sermon or exposition and yet not actually preach.

With preaching characterized as "Theology on fire," one must ask if true preaching is presently taking place in the pulpits of our land. With such a definition in view, is it not possible that many of us, though standing in our pulpits week after week, have, in fact, rarely preached?

This question is of vital importance as one considers the contemporary situation. Today we have more opportunities for the promotion of Gospel living and salvation than perhaps ever before. We have radio, television, books, seminars and the like. A surprising eighty percent of American Protestant pastors rate their preaching as excellent or good.<sup>21</sup> But our country continues to experience a continuing degradation of moral and godly behavior and motives, even within the Church. The Church is rightly scrambling to find a way to stem this tide. She is looking in some places to prayer. But more often she is looking for vision, leadership, administration, programs, and politics for an

answer. But is it possible that while the Church is looking for better methods, God may be looking for better men?<sup>22</sup>

The Old Princeton preacher believed that the pulpit was the rudder of the world's ship. As the pulpit went, so went the people; but our modern conviction on this point is beginning to change. Pastors are beginning to define the secret of preaching in other ways than that already described. Some in our day imply that the secret to preaching is the sermon title. Speaking of one secret of a powerful sermon, one leader has said, "All significance waits on a name, and, as a famous umpire once said, 'It ain't nothin' till I call it.'"<sup>23</sup>

In addition, as pastors try to minister the Gospel in this present culture, the emphasis of ministerial priority is subtly shifting from preparing the people he serves to be holy and blameless on the Day of the Lord, to running the church as an organizational structure. As a senior pastor, I know the pressures of this shift. I also understand the legitimate administrative concerns which modern ministry is forcing the pastor to consider. However, some are beginning to say that the solution for a more powerful ministry in our society is to separate preaching from leadership. In fact, one notable leader has recently stated that, "preaching is not leadership." Why? Because "providing information for people's consideration is an entirely different task than setting a course and compelling people to accept and to faithfully pursue that course of action."<sup>24</sup>

In this statement, the implied—and inadequate—definition given to preaching is simply "providing information." What is more, such information from the pulpit is not expected to compel people to follow a set course of action. Therefore, the Church's greatest need is not better preachers, but "visionary leaders at the helm" willing to take risks.<sup>25</sup> At this point, the contemporary pastor must recognize that this kind of conclusion is at odds with the

conclusions of Old Princeton. But even more, he must find such a definition of preaching wanting, in light of those descriptions of preaching given in the Scriptures.

Perhaps the reason we aren't looking to the pulpit for God's remedy for sin is because we believe that we as a Church think we know what true preaching is, and that we are presently experiencing it. We surmise then that true preaching isn't working, and we need something more. The implication is that the something more is a leader. In this way the preacher can work on his sermons and give them, while the leader can compel the people to action. But could it be possible that our assumption about the state of preaching in our culture is mistaken? What is preaching, if it is not a God-ordained act that compels God's people to accept and faithfully pursue his course of action in Christ?

Before we separate leadership from preaching, we must ask how many of our pulpits, though filled with heat, have little or no light? How many of our pulpits are filled with staged heat? How many of our pulpits have light but little or no heat? In short, are we as preachers in this present generation actually preaching? What would be the outcome if God raised up a generation of preachers whose preaching could be characterized as "theology on fire"? Listen to John Angell James, an Old Princeton contemporary, describe the effect of "theology on fire" preaching upon the mind of the hearer:

There is a silent and almost unconscious process often going on in the minds of those who are listening to the sermons of a preacher really labouring for the conversion of souls. "Is he so earnest about my salvation, and shall I care nothing about the matter? Is my eternal happiness so much in his account, and shall it be nothing in mine?" I can meet cold logic with counter arguments; or at any rate, I can raise up objections against evidence. I can smile at the artifices of rhetoric, and

be merely pleased with the displays of eloquence. I can sit unmoved under sermons which seem intended by the preacher to raise my estimate of himself, but I cannot stand this earnestness about me. The man is evidently intent upon saving my soul. I feel the grasp of his hand upon my arm, as if he would pluck me out of the fire. He has not only made me think, but he has made me feel. His earnestness has subdued me.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps we are separating leadership from preaching as the Church's vital need because our leaders have yet to subdue this generation with the earnestness here described. But it is not the earnestness of the preacher that alone subdues a congregation. The earnestness of a preacher comes from a God-given movement upon the preacher's soul. It comes from the Spirit of Christ setting the truth of Christ on fire in the preacher's own life. If the cry is for more earnestness, then the more primary cry must therefore be for more of God. Maybe young pastors like myself, longing for relief and quicker results are searching for nontheological strategies outside of the pulpit, in the boardrooms, and in the hallways. Perhaps we are not leading well because we really do not believe "that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Perhaps we have lost the courage to assert that the preacher has been given the Scriptures to teach, reprove, correct, and train regarding the daily decisions he must make (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Isn't it possible that the absence of inward heat—theology on fire—outside of the pulpit is gradually creating a non-recognized absence in the pulpit?

Pastors are, on average, giving only fifteen hours a week to sermon preparation, prayer and meditation.<sup>27</sup> Only four percent of pastors see prayer as a source of satisfaction. And while eighty-five percent of pastors say their scriptural knowledge is good (which is supposed to be what equips

the man of God for every good work), pastors feel unprepared to handle the ministry tasks they daily face. So even though pastor-teachers are to lead the Church (Ephesians 4:11-16) this feeling of being unprepared is forcing the question: Can a theologian be a leader?<sup>28</sup>

If we pastors are unable to apply the Scriptures to budgeting decisions, the methods of reaching our community, and the difficult relational issues we face, isn't it possible that we do not know the Scriptures as well as we think, and our theology as well as our degrees imply?

It is possible that the problem of a lack of Godly-power in our land is due to the hardness of the hearts of the people (Ezekiel 1-2). Most assuredly this reality exists in our present day. The preacher must therefore persevere in the assurance of God's provision and call, knowing the God who called him will be faithful.

But it is also possible that the primary problem may be found in what is becoming our modern view of preaching and preachers. Commenting on Romans 1:16, Hodge notes that "the gospel is then declared to be that through which God exercises his power."<sup>29</sup> If the Church lacks power is it not possible that it is because preachers are not giving the bulk of their efforts to the means by which God exercises his power? I humbly contend that this is a possibility we cannot afford to ignore. "Ministers are no longer exhorted to pray and fast and preach for conversion. They are challenged to market for it. . . . It seems that many have lost their confidence in the power of the Spirit to transform."<sup>30</sup> But the question of where power comes from is not limited to our modern Church. It was asked by the men of Old Princeton. "The Princeton leaders had consciously faced the key question: What was it that gave life to plain scriptural preaching? And their united answer was that it was preachers knowing and feeling in their own experience the realities of which they spoke."<sup>31</sup>

The pulpit is the rudder of the world's ship. The modern preacher must regain this conviction. J. W. Alexander certainly held such a conviction concerning preachers. He cried out, "O! that we had them! O! that those we had were inspired with greater zeal! Without any increase of our numbers, the very men we now have, if actuated with burning zeal for God, might work a mighty reformation in our country."<sup>32</sup> This conviction and subsequent prayer did not originate with J. W. Alexander. His statements are nothing more than a response to our Lord's instruction. "Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:38). The answer to the dilemma of an unreaped harvest is God-sent laborers. The call is to prayer. The author of it all is God. Preacher, do you believe, labor, and pray according to this Christ-given philosophy of Gospel-change in the land?

The secret of preaching, the kind which God has used in history to reform nations, begins with an inward heat ignited by Gospel truth upon the soul. But where does such zeal come from? To what does the tired and overwhelmed pastor turn? To what does the unprepared pastor turn?

#### THE SECRET OF PREACHING: HABITUAL PREPARATION

In the Classical Rhetorical System, the preparation of a speech began with what was termed "invention" and "arrangement." In preparing to present a discourse, invention referred to the process of seeking out the best way to argue and persuade the point to be made. This involves an appeal to *logos*, or rational argument. Arrangement then was the subsequent process of ordering "the parts of a speech to ensure that all the means of persuasion are present and properly disposed."<sup>33</sup> This process assumes a great deal of thought and effort in preparing for public discourse.

The Old Princeton view of sermon preparation follows a similar vein. In their estimation, "It is absurdly useless to talk of methods of preaching where there is no method of preparation."<sup>34</sup> The modern preacher must ask himself if he holds this same conviction. Preparation must become the primary work of the preacher.

The man of God must first recognize that as a preparer of sermons he must *be a hard worker*. As a young man, Archibald Alexander had once "pleased himself with the thoughts of retirement and escape from the awful responsibilities of ministry."<sup>35</sup> Perhaps other pastors know this aching thought. However, as an older experienced minister Alexander called young candidates for ministry, saying, "You are coming forward, my young friends, at an eventful period of the world. Read then the signs of the times. Let every man be found at his post and standing in his lot. Let no one now entering the ministry dream of a quiet or easy life, or of literary leisure."<sup>36</sup> The preacher's preparation for his public discourse, like his call to the ministry, was related to the task of an athlete. "An Athlete gains might," said J. W. Alexander, "only by great exertions. . . . The more he wrestles the better, but he must wrestle, and not merely take a great subject, and dream over it or play with it."<sup>37</sup> Miller states that one must "never imagine that any real growth in knowledge is to be obtained without labor. A little thoroughly done, every day, will make no mean amount at the end of the year."<sup>38</sup> This view of labor was not unwise but rather progressive, constant, and worthy. "Never pursue study to the point of exhaustion" was the counsel of Samuel Miller to students for the ministry.<sup>39</sup> The preacher must labor wisely. But in this regard, the preacher must not be surprised by the great exertions necessary for the fulfilling of his daily tasks. He must often see himself as Jacob wrestling with the Angel of the Lord until he has the Lord's blessing. Though it cost the minister pains, as it did Jacob,

the minister knows that pain from wrestling with God is better by far than facing the conflict coming over the ridge without such Godly wrestling (Genesis 36).

Second, one must recognize what Old Princeton meant by preparation. For the Old Princeton preacher, "Ministerial study is twofold—special and general."<sup>40</sup> The first and less fruitful kind of preparation was termed as *special* preparation. This kind of preparation is the more common practice known by our modern ministry. It refers to the matter of preparing for the sermon one has to preach the coming Sunday. Although important, Alexander's concern was that "the man who grows old with no studies but those which terminate upon the several demands of the pulpit, becomes a mannerist, falls into monotony of thought, and ends stiffly, dryly, and wearisomely."<sup>41</sup>

In contrast to contemporary sermon preparation, the Old Princeton Rhetoric insisted that the more fruitful sermon preparation must be general and habitual. Alexander continues, "By general study I mean that preparation which a liberal mind is perpetually making, by reading, writing, and thinking over and above the sermonizing, and without any direct reference to preaching."<sup>42</sup> The preacher must "always have some reading, or some intellectual employment, to fill up the small places of time which would otherwise be lost. Carry a Bible in your pocket everywhere."<sup>43</sup>

The modern preacher must stop here and examine if he holds this same conviction. Such preparation involves a "resolute pursuit of general studies, irrespectively of special performance. . . . There is no special preparation for the pulpit which can take the place of this general preparation."<sup>44</sup>

To the modern preacher, such sentiments may sound strange. So we must ask what the Old Princeton preacher considered as general or habitual preparation? How does

this kind of preparation for discourse differ from that special preparation for the appointed times of preaching in the pastor's week? The answer, in short, is that all of life is given for the minister's preparation. The preacher, as he thinks about his weekly preparation, must see his calling more broadly and his tools more expansively. For if the preparer of messages is a hard worker, he must also be *a constant learner*.

Charles Spurgeon, the great London preacher, once stated:

We must not confine ourselves to one topic of study, or we shall not exercise our whole mental manhood. God made the world for man, and made man with a mind intended to occupy and use all the world. . . . Why refuse to taste any of the cleansed meats the great Father has put upon the table?<sup>45</sup>

In like manner, Samuel Miller urged the minister, "Do not confine your reading to books that are narrowly theological. Try to keep pace with the current literature of the day by reading the most important new books which appear."<sup>46</sup> "The minister should be not only an earnest preacher but a skillful casuist."<sup>47</sup> As an ambassador of Christ and a physician of the soul, the preacher sees his calling as constant learning. "Never cease being a student. You can depend on the fact that no minister will ever be useful or popular who is not a constant and diligent student."<sup>48</sup> Every branch of learning is an open field in which to harvest truth for use in communicating the mind of God to man.

However, as the preacher seeks to cultivate a breadth of learning he is to remember the purpose of such constant learning. Samuel Miller puts an appeal for general learning into the context of its proper purpose when he states:

Every branch of knowledge is helpful and desirable to the Christian minister: Not to enable him to shine, as a man of learning—this is definitely beneath the aim of an ambassador of Christ—but to make him a more accomplished and useful teacher of others. For it is certain that the more he attains a solid science . . . the more clearly will he be able to explain the sacred volume and the more wisely and forcible to preach that Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.<sup>49</sup>

Miller continues: As much of such learning "ought to be acquired, as may enable their possessor the better to understand the Scriptures, and the better to defend the Gospel."<sup>50</sup> An example of how such learning was used in public discourse can be found in a sermon by Archibald Alexander titled "The Knowledge of Sin by the Law." Speaking of the sinful nature, Alexander uses his knowledge of the general working of machinery to make his point. He states:

Human nature may be compared to a complicated machine, which has within it, powerful springs which keep it in operation. But such a machine requires a balance or regulator, which may preserve all the parts in their proper places, and give due energy and direction to every part. If the balance wheel, be taken away, the machine loses none of its power, but its action becomes irregular, and no longer sub serves the purpose for which it was put in motion. It moves, it may be, more rapidly than before, but to its own ruin. So it is with man. He is an agent, possessing active powers and a variety of appetites, affections, and passions, which require to be regulated, and properly directed; otherwise, their most powerful action will be of a ruinous character.<sup>51</sup>

Alexander then asks: What is the regulating principle in man? And answers: the light (illumination) of God and the

love of God. Similarly, Charles Hodge uses his knowledge of geography in his sermon outline titled, "Mighty in the Scripture" on Acts 18:24 (dated March 15, 1863). Hodge declares:

The Scriptures are like the ocean, boundless and unfathomable. No man can ever exhaust the stores of knowledge treasured in the ocean. (1) It may be viewed in reference to its distribution and topography; its great expanse, as it spreads between Asia and America, between America and Europe and Africa, between Africa and India; its indentations, gulfs, bays, etc., and the effects which this distribution has on climate, winds, rain, fertility, and hence on commerce, and the destiny of the human race. (2) It may be studied as to its basin, its mountains and valleys, the configuration of the crust of the earth on which it rests, and the nature of its bottom in different places. (3) It may be investigated as to its animals, the innumerable genera and species of living organisms with which it abounds, from the whale to the animalcule, and the changes produced by the presence and labors of the millions of insects, rendering luminous miles of its surface, or building up reefs and islands and continents from its deeps. (4) It may be studied as to its tides, its currents, and its prevailing winds. (5) [It may be studied] as to its chemistry. (6) Besides all these kinds of knowledge, there is another kind, which can be obtained only by living on it; the knowledge of how to use it, how to avail ourselves of its power and resources. It is plain that a man may have much of the other kinds of this oceanic knowledge, and very little of the last kind.

All this may be applied to Scripture. It may be studied under different aspects, and in each, furnish inexhaustible stores of knowledge. It may be viewed as a history extending from the creation to the present time, including its genealogical periods, its antediluvian period, its patriarchal period, its Jewish period, its life of Christ, its apostolic period. A man might spend his life in getting a clear knowledge of its

facts, then of the bearing of those facts on ethnography, on the civilization of the world, on the destiny of the nations generally, and on the religions of men.<sup>52</sup>

Such a view of preparation as one of constant learning will remind the student of rhetoric of Cicero's conviction that "no man can be an orator complete in all points of merit, who has not attained a knowledge of all important subjects and arts."<sup>53</sup>

But as one reads the sermons and outlines of these preachers, one is struck by the regular absence of any show of knowledge, and often feels the presence of the Gospel communicated in a style plain and clear. This is no accident. When listing such branches of learning as grammar, logic, natural philosophy, natural history, geography, and polite literature, Samuel Miller defines *the proper priority* of the preacher as he peruses such knowledge. Such "branches of learning," although important, "are, indeed, only auxiliary to the main body . . . of ministerial erudition."<sup>54</sup> This brings us to the most important content of study for habitual preparation for ministry: the Scriptures.

No man can be uniformly a good preacher who is not habitually perusing the Scriptures as his book of delights. There is no special preparation for the pulpit which can take the place of this general preparation."<sup>55</sup> "Constant perusal and re-perusal of Scripture is the great preparation for preaching."<sup>56</sup> This constant perusal of the Scriptures is incumbent upon the preacher because of the task to which he has been called by God. The preacher's preparation, therefore, necessitates hard work and constant learning because the preacher *is a workman of the Word*.

This view of the preacher and his preparation was found in the apostle Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15. Samuel Miller says concerning this fact that the minister of the Gospel must :

be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." He "is to be ready on all occasions, to explain the Scriptures. This is his first and chief work. . . . He is . . . to explain the Word of God, as one who has made it the object of his deep and successful study. He is set for the defense of the Gospel; and therefore, must be qualified to answer the objections of infidels; to repel the insinuations and cavils of skeptics; to detect, expose, and refute the ever varying forms of heresy; and to give notice, and stand in the breach, when men, ever so covertly or artfully, depart from the faith once delivered to the saints. He is to be ready to solve the doubts, and satisfy the scruples of conscientious believers; to give instruction to the numerous classes of respectful and serious inquirers; to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine."<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, Alexander calls you as a preacher to "engrave it upon your souls, that the whole business of your life is to prepare yourself for the work, and that no concentration of powers can be too great."<sup>58</sup> He continues, "We are not talking now of amusements, but of dogged labor."<sup>59</sup> The object of the preacher's hard work and constant learning is the Word of God of which the preacher is a steward. "The best flights of the minister's meditations are those with which he is indulged after copious perusal of the simple Word of God."<sup>60</sup>

To have a ministry built on habitual preparation means the man of God will regularly endeavor to bring the whole of life's knowledge within the framework of God's dominion and activity. In this way the preacher will be practicing Paul's statement of ministry by taking "every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

As the preacher defines his preparation in terms of habitual study, hard work, and constant learning, he becomes a man whose God-sourced zeal encompasses

common as well as special times.

To be scriptural in preaching we must be familiar with the Bible at common times. . . . Such is the sympathy between soul and soul that a connection of thoughts which is easy, agreeable, and awakening to the hearer, will always be found to be that which has been natural and unconstrained in the mind of the preacher.<sup>61</sup>

The preacher's aim therefore is to be pleasing to God in his duties, even when absent from his congregation (2 Corinthians 5:9). In this way the preacher is ready to preach the Word in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2). He then begins to imitate in some small way his Lord who preached on the hillside to the multitudes "in season." The same Lord then, preached "out of season" while taking a needed rest by a Samaritan well between public discourses (John 4). The reason why such habitual preparation is the secret of preaching is because it demonstrates the daily communion of the preacher with God.

The Princeton contemporary, Phillips Brooks, in his famous *Lectures on Preaching*, summarizes this thought:

The sermon is truth and man together; it is the truth brought through the man. . . . Now the truth which the preacher has gathered on Friday for the sermon which he preaches on Sunday, has come across the man, but it has not come through the man. It has never been wrought into his experience. . . . If I am right in this idea, then it will follow that the preacher's life must be a life of large accumulation. He must not be always trying to make sermons, but always seeking truth and out of the truth which he has won, the sermons will make themselves.<sup>62</sup>

Does our modern pulpit evidence truth coming across, or through, its preachers? The answer can be found in the definition of preparation we preachers are giving ourselves to each week. If it is found that truth is coming across us, but not through us, is it any wonder the modern Church is

turning to other things to find Gospel power in its generation? And if the Church is turning away from the pulpit to other things for its strength, is it still surprising that the Church is little familiar with that gospel-power our forefathers have known?

As preachers we must regain the conviction that

diligence in the duties of our calling, with a view to the glory of God, is an evidence (of growth in grace) not to be despised. . . . If we would enjoy spiritual comfort, we must be in a thriving condition. None enjoy the pleasures of bodily health, but they who are in health. If we would be useful to the Church and the world we must be growing Christians. If we would live in daily preparation for our change, we must endeavor to grow in grace daily.<sup>63</sup>

The preacher may complain within himself when he hears the exhortation to engage in hard work and constant learning. He may think to himself, how can I do anything more than what I am doing? And if he thinks he has no time to prepare, he must ask himself to what he is giving his time. The conviction of Old Princeton was to give one's exertions to the preparation of the Word. For some, therefore, the call is not to do more things. Rather, the call is to start giving all their energy to doing the right things.

So how does a preacher go about this task of habitual preparation? What was the method by which this general or habitual study was carried out in the preacher's daily life?

#### THE SECRET OF PREACHING: MAINTENANCE AND MEDITATION

The first tool necessary to begin a ministry of habitual preparation is what we might call maintenance, or a *book in the hand*. Maintenance refers to the constant labor to attain

an understanding of the Scriptures and of those propositions in other branches of learning which can be elucidated in communicating the Scriptures. The preacher sees a part of his daily task as one of maintenance. The preacher must continue in the things which he has learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom he has learned them (2 Timothy 3:14). He knows that he must daily maintain and hold fast the standard of sound words committed to him (2 Timothy 1:13). The preacher must guard what has been entrusted to him (1 Timothy 6:20), and he is to grow in his own understanding of these things. The preacher is sobered by Paul's exhortation to "Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:15-16). So the preacher constantly has "a book in his hand." In particular, as has been noted, he has "the" Book constantly in his hand and before his eyes. The preacher understands that this maintenance of the Gospel once for all delivered is a priority to his daily tasks. We might note the example of how Archibald Alexander sought to live this out. As a young man wrestling with the things of God, Alexander "was seldom without a book in his hand, except when he was giving up his mind to solitary meditation."<sup>64</sup> This practice continued through his life. While a pastor in Philadelphia, Alexander always spent his time in much broader ways than preaching, pastoral visitation, and social concern. These were his appointed times requiring special preparation. But habitually and generally, he made use of his access to

local libraries, book sellers, and stimulating personal contacts. He had a penchant for language study, and read extensively in the Latin theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, including Romanist, Lutheran, as well as Reformed. He continued his diligent study of the Greek New Testament and began a more advanced study of Hebrew under the guidance of a learned Jew, developing the regular habit of reading at least a chapter a day in the Hebrew Old Testament. He also acquired and diligently studied volumes on the history and practice of textual criticism and biblical interpretation.<sup>65</sup>

The idea of a book in the hand can be found in the ministries of other able preachers such as Edwards, Spurgeon, and Lloyd-Jones. These men, in likeness to the Princeton men, literally did have a book in their hand at common times. Such an ideal is not a calling to be these men. They were uncommonly gifted men. Yet, this idea of maintenance does behoove the preacher who is commonly gifted to rise to the degree of giftedness afforded him by God. In this way, the preacher must "fan into flame" the gifts and calling given him (2 Timothy 1:6). For the contemporary preacher, this principle will lead him to examine his priority in the use of television and other ways of spending his "free-time."

However, the Old Princeton view of habitual growth in knowledge was tempered by the teaching, for example, of the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 8:1-2, the Apostle instructs us that "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge." It was knowing, as one ought to know that remained the daily task of the Old Princeton preacher. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones once stated, "It is possible for us to develop a false notion of knowledge." In comparing preaching to reading, Lloyd-Jones continues,

a preacher not only expounds but also applies the Scriptures, and thereby makes sure that application takes place. When a

man reads a book, however, he may never come to application. He can decide to shut the book and stop whenever he likes; there is no insistence upon the application.<sup>66</sup>

It was this insistence upon the application that characterized the habitual preparation of the Old Princeton preacher. They understood that it is necessary and vital for a preacher to gather this information and maintain it. But the preacher is in a dangerous position if he does not move on from maintenance of information and come to the application of that information. Therefore, the preacher must not only be engaging daily in maintenance, but he must do so by intentional and consistent meditation before the Lord.

J. W. Alexander notes that:

books are and must continue to be the great channels of knowledge, and fertilizing stimulants of the mind. But we would have the young preacher not to look on them as the sheaves of harvest. Great importance attaches itself to sound views of the place which human compositions occupy in mental training. Crude, immature learners . . . exercise themselves to reproduce the contents of favorite authors, in their very sequence, if not in their very words. But the same persons, if destined for anything greater than slavish repeaters, soon arrive at a discovery, that a day of multifarious reading needs to be followed by an evening of reflection, in order to conduce to any progress.<sup>67</sup>

Consequently, if the preacher is to know the fruit and effectiveness which come from habitual preparation, this meditation upon the things of God must become the daily priority of his work.

To understand what was meant by meditation we may refer to Charles Hodge. In a sermon outline titled "Medita-

tion As a Means of Grace," Hodge defines meditation as "the serious, prolonged, devout contemplation of divine things." Such an exercise "is distinguished from mere intellectual examination and consideration. It has a different object. The object of the one is to understand, of the other to experience the power." It is therefore through meditation that doctrine is to be experienced in the soul of the preacher.

This power that is the secret to preaching and the aim of habitual preparation is what might be called "God shining upon the page." In his inaugural sermon from John 5:39, Archibald Alexander wrote:

He who would understand the Scriptures, therefore, ought not to lean on his own understanding, but by continual and earnest prayer should look unto the Father of lights, from whom proceedeth every good and perfect gift; and who hath promised to give wisdom to those who lack it, and ask for it. . . . How delightful must it be to sit as a disciple at the feet of Jesus and with a childlike docility imbibe precious instruction from his Word and Spirit! . . . when at any time it please God to shine upon his Word, whilst the believer reads its sacred contents, what a divine glory illuminates the holy page! What attractive beauty draws forth the best affections of his heart! What wonders do his opened eyes behold in the cross! . . . O! could the pious reader of the Scriptures constantly retain these spiritual views and these holy impressions, heaven would be begun.<sup>69</sup>

The preacher must move from his own understanding to that which God has revealed in the sacred page. If the preacher is to do this, he must depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to illumine the Word for that end. "For the knowledge we seek and need," says Hodge, "is of the nature of revelation." Hodge continues:

Paul prays that the Father of glory would give the Ephesians the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of himself (1:17). From this two important inferences follow. First, that meditation is a waiting for the manifestation of the truth. . . . We must humbly, prayerfully wait for the revelation. Second, this revelation being to the spiritual sense, through the understanding, never takes place except when the truth is before the mind. That is, the supernatural super-venes on the natural, and in the use of the natural means. Hence it is vain to expect these spiritual disclosures unless we meditate.<sup>70</sup>

Do we honestly believe today that we can expect spiritual disclosures from God when we meditate on his Word, and the Spirit of God meets us in it? Archibald Alexander believed it.

Be much in the perusal of the Holy Scriptures, and strive to obtain clear and consistent views of the plan of redemption. Learn to contemplate the truth in its true nature, simply, devoutly, and long at a time, that you may receive on your soul the impression which it is calculated to make.<sup>71</sup>

It is through maintenance, therefore, that a preacher gets the truth into his head and understanding. But it is by meditation upon that truth that the calculated impression intended by God from that doctrine to the soul becomes felt and real through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

We recognize at once the conviction that meditation upon God's truth is both the priority of a preacher's ministry and the place from which his power in that ministry comes. This is so, because meditation on the Word in prayer is the ordained means that the Holy Spirit uses to apply Christ to the soul.

The modern preacher may be tempted to rationalize that he has not the same amount of time available as did these men of old, and therefore meditation is impossible. But, then we note that the modern man may spend more time each day in study because of the conveniences of communication and computers than did the Princeton preacher. Perhaps the modern preacher may think to himself that his ministry can be as effective today without such meditation. But then he must examine whether the power of what these men described and experienced in their ministry is common to anything the modern preacher presently knows and experiences of God. In any case, this priority of meditation is nothing more than what the Scriptures teach the preacher. Such a meditating man will be like "trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper" (Psalm 1:3).

The modern preacher must ask himself to what he is presently turning in order to bring forth fruit in season and to keep his leaf from withering. The contemporary preacher gives on average only two hours a week to meditation.<sup>72</sup> He is therefore giving only two hours a week to the God-ordained means for Gospel power. It is this lack of conviction and practice regarding the necessity and appreciation of meditation—so vital to the secret of preaching—which hinders the power of the modern pulpit. Is it any wonder that our leaves are withering? The modern preacher must therefore be turning somewhere else to find Gospel power each week. Do we not recognize that we still await the power which God intends for the preachers he calls to his pulpits?

Charles Hodge states that such exercise of meditation must be directed "from the purpose to be faithful in its discharge, from a sense of duty and conviction of its importance."<sup>73</sup> Because the modern preacher may have no such

conviction, his day may be determined by the convictions of others, or his day may be determined by the conviction that other things will breathe more life into the effectiveness of his ministry. Therefore the modern preacher may give himself to times and places which afford him little opportunity to sit at his Master's feet. The modern preacher may find himself like Martha, "distracted with all her preparations," so that he has forgotten the one thing needed. In this state, he goes day after day trying to serve Jesus, without ever choosing "the better part" which Mary chose as she sat at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:38-42). In his sermon, "One Thing Needful," Dr. Alexander states:

Now, faith cannot be separated from spiritual knowledge. This last is included in it as presenting to the mind all the objects of faith. This is saving knowledge. The object of it, or the truths known are all indeed contained in the revelation of God; but the discernment of their true nature—their beauty and their glory—is by the illumination of the holy Spirit, who takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us. . . . Certainly, then, the one thing needful for man, is the true knowledge of the way of life. This is to him the good part which he has chosen for his heritage, and equally needful for all. Of this knowledge, Christ is the sum and substance. Therefore, the apostle Paul said, "I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." It is in his face we behold the brightest rays of the divine glory; beholding which, we are transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.<sup>74</sup>

If the preacher is to behold such illumination of God upon the pages of his Bible, he must hear Hodge push him to "Have a time and place sacred to this duty."<sup>75</sup> The modern preacher must examine his daily planner. Does he see therein a time and place set aside for the work of medita-

tion? If not, the preacher is confronted with the fact that he is turning elsewhere, and prioritizing something else to bear fruit in season and keep his leaves from withering. Such practice, if continued, will minimize rather than maximize the preacher's effectiveness as he continues to grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

How does a preacher begin to meditate on the things of God? Hodge urges the preacher to "Connect it [meditation] with prayer, not only in the formal sense of the word, but also as meaning converse with God." In addition, the preacher must "Connect it with the reading of the Scriptures. Mediate on the word. Read it slowly, with self application, and pondering its import."<sup>76</sup> This idea of slow reading is contrary to the rapid reading the busy preacher engages in so he can move on to other more pressing and important activity. However, this kind of hurried practice receives a warning from Archibald Alexander. Dr. Alexander, in his sermon "Keeping Alive the Love of God," says that "the neglect or careless performance of the duties of the closet, cannot but have the effect of cooling the ardor of piety in the soul; especially the neglect of reading the word of God which is calculated to furnish fuel to the fire of divine love."<sup>77</sup>

Many modern preachers are low on fuel and fire. The demands of other consciences and of the ministry tempt him to find fuel in other places; but the wise counsel of Old Princeton calls to mind the Psalmist who declared, "My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your Word" (Psalm 119:28). When spoken against, the preacher must turn to meditating on the Word (Psalm 119:23). If the preacher wants the wisdom needed in light of the teachings of others he must meditate on the Scriptures (Psalm 119:99). Such meditation is the manifestation of the preacher's love for and delight in God. It is the basis upon which he preaches to powerful and even difficult

audiences, (Psalm 119:46-48). If the preacher needs understanding of God's precepts, meditation must be his resolve (Psalm 119:27). In all of this, the preacher is declaring where true fuel and fire must come. He says by his daily movement, "My soul clings to the dust, revive me according to your Word" (Psalm 119:25). If such a conviction is not demonstrated in the conscience and practice of the modern pulpit, is it any wonder it is absent in the pews of this generation?

True power and revival from the preacher must come from the Spirit of God, melting the man as he maintains and meditates on the Word of God. Because of this, the modern preacher must gain the conviction that moves him to declare, "I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your Word" (Psalm 119:15-16). I contend that this is the secret, missing in the modern pulpit, which causes a depletion of Gospel power in the modern pulpit and pew.

Why is this the case? One reason the modern preacher may not practice meditation is discouragement due to wandering thoughts nagging him about the pressing business of the day. Another reason may be that the preacher of our modern times, with his emphasis upon the immediate, may spurn meditation on the eternal. He finds himself impatient, and so the preacher runs to tasks that afford him an immediate sense of accomplishment and affirmation while neglecting the harder but more necessary work. He is tempted to mimic the Pharisees who concentrated daily on cleaning the outside of the cup and dish to look presentable to his "congregation," while neglecting the more important and hidden part on the inside (Matthew 23:26). By running from task to task, the preacher can satisfy the demands of some in the congregation with tangible evidence of his work. More importantly he can gain a temporary feeling of accomplishment. Congregations, though

they ask about many things, rarely demand meditation and prayer from their preacher. The preacher may therefore demand little of this for himself. But, the preacher must meditate on the one who called him. Even if some sheep demand the shepherd to do otherwise, he must be able to declare, "Oh how I love your Law! It is my meditation all day long" (Psalm 119:97). In addition, the preacher may be unwilling week after week to go to the place of brokenness and heart examination to which meditation will take him. He may choose therefore the more shallow and numb places and avoid the deep and lively places which come from being met by the cross day upon day. The preacher who would know the Spirit's work of setting truth ablaze in his soul must be *practically* familiar with the words of the Savior to the apostle Peter. "Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and go to wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go. (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, 'Follow me'" (John 21:18). The preacher by dying to himself and going where Christ bids him to go, will by God's grace, glorify God among God's people. Without this, the preacher tries to preach Christ and the cross from a numbed distance. To the preacher who knows this distant numbness, the words of Philip Pugh to young Daniel Rowland are medicinal: "Preach the Gospel to the people, dear Sir, and apply the Balm of Gilead, the blood of Christ, to their spiritual wounds, and show the necessity of faith in the crucified Saviour." "I am afraid," said Rowland, "that I have not that faith myself in its vigour and full exercise." "Preach on it," said Pugh, "till you feel it in that way; no doubt it will come."<sup>78</sup>

The modern preacher will be encouraged by Charles

Hodge who sees meditation as something to progress and persevere in. He calls the preacher to:

Cultivate the habit of controlling your thoughts. Do not let them be governed by accident or fortuitous associations. Keep the rudder always in your hand. . . . Do not be discouraged by frequent failure; and do not suppose that the excitement of feeling is the measure of advantage. There may be much learned, and much strength gained with little emotion.<sup>79</sup>

This is so, because a preacher's sanctification is like that of those he shepherds. It is progressive and constant. Therefore, "As the growth in grace is gradual, and the progress from day to day imperceptible, we should aim to do something in this work every day."<sup>80</sup>

The preacher must therefore set his sights on the constant and progressive more than he sets his sights on the immediate and complete. He labors therefore in the unseen. This is difficult, because his ministerial colleagues claim that church growth results from certain methods and programs. But the preacher must remember the Lord's instruction of the soils and the seed. There is a kind of seed which springs up with great joy but is proven by time to be choked out, rendered ineffective, or to have no root (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23). Oh, the tragedy that a man labors long and hard, only to find in time that there is no lasting root. Therefore, "It should not be forgotten that divine illumination is not independent of the Word, but accompanies it. Those Christians, therefore, who are most diligent in attending upon the Word in public and private, will be most likely to make progress in piety."<sup>81</sup>

The preacher must possess the conviction that Gospel power comes from "God shining upon the page." God has chosen to do this by his Holy Spirit illuminating a truth of

Christ and burning it as a felt presence into the soul of a meditating man. With such a view of preparation, the modern pastor may find himself feeling overwhelmed as he asks himself how he can practice such meditation in the midst of the demands which presently claim his time. He may not know where to begin. He needs to begin with confession to his God for his shortcoming and then lay hold of his Advocate, Jesus Christ, for forgiveness. At the cross the modern preacher can begin, with God's help, to build and practice a philosophy of ministry that values "a book in the hand" and seeks "God shining upon the page." At the cross he can demonstrate that the power of God for salvation is the Gospel of God preached through a meditating man. If these things are to describe the modern pulpit, the men who rise to such pulpits must be characterized by lives of "habit and affection."

#### THE SECRET OF PREACHING: HABIT AND AFFECTION

The term "habit and affection" is often seen upon the pages of Old Princeton sermons. Habit refers to the constant, disciplined, and consistent use of the means of grace. Affection refers to the emotional response to the truths illuminated through those ordinary means. This is especially true of Archibald Alexander. These two terms identify a characterizing factor in the daily life of the preacher. In his sermon "Keeping Alive the Love of God," Alexander proclaims the importance of habit and affection. Because of its importance, I quote his flow of thought in full. He states that:

Every habit and affection is preserved in vigor, and increased by frequent exercise. If we desire to strengthen any member of our body, or to render our senses more acute and susceptible, we find no method more effectual than to exercise incessantly those parts which we wish to improve. Habits and

affections of the mind follow the same law, and are strengthened imperceptibly, but powerfully, by exercise. Even in regard to our affection to earthly friends, if we seldom think of them, and do not enjoy their company, our love grows cold. Hence, memorials of absent friends, and correspondence by letters, are so much in use, for it is found, that the frequent recollection of those whom we love, keeps alive our affection, which otherwise would be apt to die away for want of exercise. Thus it behooves us to keep ourselves in the love of God, be frequently calling up in our minds the idea of his excellence and his ineffable love to us. The cultivation of other holy affections, and the conscientious discharge of all incumbent duties, will also help to preserve alive our love to God. The greatest hindrance to the exercise and increase of our love to God, is our blindness of mind and unbelief. The objects of sense too much occupy and interest us; while spiritual and invisible objects are obscurely perceived, and make a feeble and transient impression on the mind. Although we know that God is ever present with us, and takes cognizance of all our thoughts and actions; yet how little are we affected habitually, by this truth! In order, therefore, to preserve our souls in the lively exercise of the love of God, we must seek an increase of that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen"—that faith which "sees him, that is invisible"—which "looks not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are not seen, which are eternal."<sup>82</sup>

The preacher recognizes that his mind and affections must be engaged in the things of God. He also recognizes that the affections are stirred as the mind lays hold of God in meditation, and is then laid hold of by God, as the Holy Spirit illumines the pages of his Word. Such illumination of Christ before the mind of the preacher often engages and stirs the preacher's affections for Christ and therefore the things of Christ. Such habit and resulting affections

"furnish the fuel to the fire of divine love." It therefore enables the preacher to know God's power in his daily ministry in the Gospel. This philosophy of habit and affection now gives understanding to the Old Princeton conviction of habitual preparation, maintenance and meditation. From these, the modern preacher may glean the important tools with which to begin a life and ministry characterized by habit and affection in and for Christ.

First, the preacher must come to the conviction that *the cultivation of his mind* is essential for an able and faithful ministry. Charles Spurgeon once noted that "Our ministry demands mind."<sup>83</sup> Such is the wise counsel of Old Princeton. "Not infrequently, as history shows, the founder of an institution becomes its abiding image."<sup>84</sup> This was true of Princeton Seminary as it reflected the thought of its founder, Archibald Alexander. Dr. Alexander's belief that the cultivation of the preacher's mind was essential to his work began when he was a young candidate for the ministry. Upon considering God's call upon his life, young Alexander went to a local pastor, a Rev. Graham, and requested to be taught by him for study for the ministry. Upon hearing the young Alexander's request, the elder preacher "smiled and said, if you mean ever to be a theologian, you must come at it not by reading but by thinking."<sup>85</sup> We must ask if our elder preachers can give such advice to their young men in our day. Samuel Miller echoed these sentiments. In his "Rules for Students for the Ministry," he states,

Be deeply persuaded of the importance of theological study. Cherish a thirst for knowledge. Aim high: resolve, if you may, to be a workman that shall not need to be ashamed. Consider no labor too great that may be necessary to attain your object.<sup>86</sup>

And Charles Hodge stated that

the senses can be indefinitely improved by cultivation. So the faculty of spiritual discernment and the consequent spirituality of mind is increased by meditation. The effect produced by sensible objects is either from often-repeated acts of perception, or by long-continued contemplation. So in spiritual things, the thoughts of God, of Christ, of eternity, which are constantly coating through the mind produce a constant effect, but this is no adequate substitute for long-continued meditation.<sup>87</sup>

And so the apostle's instruction that transformation in the Gospel comes about by the renewing of one's mind with Gospel truth must become the preacher's conviction (Romans 12:1-2).

Second, habit and affection which exercise the mind upon God's Word waiting upon the illumination of the Holy Spirit are aided by "time and a pen." The preacher's maintenance and meditation necessitate the allotment and use of time. The modern preacher is tempted to feel unproductive if he is unable to produce a felt result from the use of his day. A mother whose day is filled with children, diapers, chores, and baby talk might find it difficult to define what she did with her day. Even so, her work was essential, precious, and vital for the life of her children; and that undefinable effort, day after day, is producing the definable work of godliness in the lives of her children who, in their maturity, may reflect her work's true worth. Even her husband may think she works less than he, because the results are yet to be seen. This is true for the preacher. Like the work of the mother, he may think such habits and affections show little in the present and so he may despise such work. Or like an ignorant husband, he may hear the examinations from those in the congregation who value immedi-

ate results more than lasting power in the ministry. And so the modern preacher may turn from the hard and hidden work so described by Old Princeton. But Dr. Alexander "loved to ponder long, without book or pen often with eyes closed or in darkness."<sup>88</sup> Do we preachers consider such time well spent? What if someone peeked in the window and saw us using our time in such a way? Can we stand as a shepherd on the conviction that the sheep must learn that such time is well spent? J. W. Alexander exhorts the preacher to "dwell on good thought. Lift your eyes from the page—think it out."<sup>89</sup> And so the preacher is to value time spent in meditative thought before God.

Then to aid in exercising the mind in such preparation, the preacher must use a pen. The best way to ascertain one's understanding of a subject, or to plot out the matter to be preached, is to always have a pen in hand. "Think with pen in hand. . . . Be full of the subject and then write with perfect freedom beginning at any corner of the subject."<sup>90</sup> Samuel Miller urges the same, exhorting the preacher to "Study with a pen in your hand. . . . Test your understanding of anything by writing it out."<sup>91</sup> In this way, the Old Princeton preachers reflected the view of ministry of other preachers who have been clothed with power from on high. From the "Common-place books" of Perkins and the "Miscellany's" of Jonathan Edwards, to the "skeletons" of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, this view of the minister's use of time demonstrates a philosophy of ministry which confronts the modern preacher's view of his daily task.

Third, the preacher must recognize that study or preparation is *an act of worship*. Some modern communication theories assert that "rhetorical communication includes three essential parts: the source, the channel, and the receiver."<sup>92</sup> The source refers to the one speaking. The channel refers to the means by which one speaks. The receiver refers to the audience for whom the source is using a chan-

nel to give a message. But the preacher recognizes that his communication is prepared and presented with a fourth essential element in mind. The preacher is always seen by God. He must, therefore, view his preparation in the presence of God. The preacher must depend upon God for power and strength through prayer and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Samuel Miller, for example, exhorts the preacher constantly to ask for the aid of the Holy Spirit in study:

Is it unreasonable to believe that the Spirit of God can enlarge their intellects, broaden their vision and give them clearer views than without his blessing they could not have attained? If we ask God's blessing when we sit down for a meal should we not do so when we begin an intellectual feast?<sup>93</sup>

Miller's conviction is that one must "seek to study with a devout spirit, under the impression that the subjects which you are engaged in examining are holy and the knowledge you are gaining is sacred."<sup>94</sup> In this way, "growth in grace is evinced by a . . . habitual vigilance" in the things of God.<sup>95</sup>

According to Old Princeton, the secret of preaching is found in habitual preparation. This leads the preacher to lay hold of the things of God with his mind. Then through the means of a book in the hand, time, and a pen, the preacher prayerfully and actively waits upon God by meditating on the words and works of God until God shines on the page with the illuminating and powerful work of the Holy Spirit. In this way, holy affections for Christ are stirred in the man of God as he meditates upon the things of God and is met by the Spirit of God. These things then fuel a fire in the man that evidences itself in the daily life and ministry of the preacher.

The preacher who desires the power of God on his pulpit ministry must constantly assess his priorities in his use of time for study and sermon preparation. "It will be your duty to impress on your people the truth, that you are really serving them when you are in your study, as when you are in their houses."<sup>96</sup> Preachers of this generation: Do you believe this?

### THE SECRET OF PREACHING: CONCLUSION

What then is the secret of preaching? The secret begins with an inward heat born out of habitual preparation before the things of God. The preacher's special preparation then is like sacred cups, into which the life-giving waters of his habitual preparation before God are poured. The preacher has given continual time to daily wrestling, writing, and thinking long and hard on the things of God. Then in preparing for and presenting a particular sermon, he will preach more genuinely from full understanding of having taken much time to "live" the doctrine. When called upon as if "out of season" in the hallways or on the phone or in a hospital, the preacher pulls forth the truths of Christ which are stored up like coal heating a fire of divine love within him. The preacher is likened then to Joseph who prepared his storehouses ahead of time so that in times of famine he fed the people from the abundance of stored-up grain. The preacher views his preparation for discourse in light of Solomon's exhortation to "go to the ant." "Consider her ways and be wise. Without having any chief or officer or ruler, it prepares its food in summer and gathers its sustenance in harvest" (Proverbs 6:6-8).

However, the preacher does have a "chief" and "officer"—the overseer of his soul and of those God has called him to serve. Dr. Miller, therefore calls to us:

Behold, my young friends, the high character at which you

are called to aim! You have come hither, not that you may prepare to shine; not that you may prepare to amuse men by philosophic discussion, or to astonish them by flights of artificial eloquence; but that, by the blessing of God, upon the use of means, you may become faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also; that you may become wise in winning souls to Christ; that you may prepare to go forth, defending and proclaiming the messages of grace to guilty men, and persuading them to be reconciled to God. It is noble to excel. But let it be always for the edifying of the Church. This, my young friends, this is the object which is recommended to your sacred emulation. We charge you, in the presence of God, to let all your studies and aims be directed to this grand object. Seek with humble, persevering, prayerful diligence, to be such ministers as you have heard described; and you will neither disappoint yourselves, nor the Church of Christ. Seek to be anything else, and you will be a grief and a curse to both. May God the Savior bless you, and prepare you to be workmen that need not be ashamed!<sup>97</sup>

### Author

Zachary Eswine is pastor of Grace Church of the Western Reserve, Hudson, Ohio. Besides preaching and writing, he composes songs with an emphasis on doctrinal soundness and artistic excellence. He is a Ph. D. candidate at Regent University, Virginia Beach, Virginia, and a student of preaching and its relationship to revival. He lives in Stow, Ohio, and is married with two children.

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