

**THE SCRIPTURAL METHOD
OF
ADDRESSING
THE UNCONVERTED.**

From The Earthen Vessel

*Paper read at Pastor's Conference, Little Alie-street,
September 29, 1893.*

BY E. WHITE.

AS ministers of Jesus Christ we desire to make full proof of our ministry, and to rightly and faithfully discharge every part of the solemn trust we have received from our Lord and Master. We are anxious that we may be able to say to our hearers in the language of the apostle, "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." We have the flock of God to feed which He hath purchased with His blood, and who are savingly brought to know Him. But we have to seek the wandering sheep who are of His fold, and yet they are far from Him by blindness, alienation, and rebellion.

How shall we address men in a state of unregeneracy? This is the question, which occupies our consideration at this time. Shall we indiscriminately tell all men that Christ died for them, and now He waits for them to take His offered mercy? Nay, this is to deny the, plainest statement of Scripture, and contradict the distinguishing doctrines of grace, which are as clear as the sun at mid-day to eyes spiritually enlightened. Shall we command men who are dead in sins to do spiritual living acts, such as godly repentance, which is given by an exalted Saviour, or evangelical faith which is a free grace gift of God to His own elect: " For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God "? Shall we tell unregenerate men that every sermon they hear, if they do not repent and believe the Gospel, will add each time to their damnation? Such statements as these make the Gospel, instead of a message of good tidings, a law of terror. The Gospel is wholly remedial and not punitive; it brings the news of salvation, and not of avenging justice. Shall we beseech, implore, entreat, and persuade dead sinners to turn to God, and tell them they will be damned for not doing so? We are not lacking in tenderness of spirit towards our fellow-sinners, and deep anxiety for their salvation, but we dare not tell them to do what we know is impossible, and for which we have no scriptural warrant. Amidst these conflicting opinions and self-contradictory assertions, let us seek out! The more excellent way. We turn to Holy Writ and seek not only our matter, but our method from that pure fount.

I. We insist upon the authority of that Word. It unhesitatingly and clearly shows man's lost and ruined condition as a sinner in the sight of God. It shows what a rebel he is; and the holiness and majesty of God. It charges him with guilt, and convicts him as a criminal. It lays the axe to the root of the tree unsparingly, and denounces sin in all its forms. It condones; mitigates, or extenuates man's guilt in no way whatever. Thus would we show the unconverted man his state, speaking especially against those crimes we may know certain persons to be guilty of; as Peter showed in the days of Pentecost that his hearers were guilty of imbruing their hands in Christ's blood; and Paul when speaking before the adulterous Felix, reasoned with him of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.

II. We would explain and enforce the holiness and inflexibility of God's law; that though man has fallen and become a ruined, helpless creature, the law has not changed nor relaxed in the least any of its claims. It still demands perfect obedience, and metes out its punishments unsparingly against every offender. It curses and condemns for the least transgression; and we should point out to every unconverted man, whether he prides himself on his morality, or is living in open, flagrant sin, that by his works he cannot be saved: that he is already under the curse of a broken law. We would show the spirituality of that law; that it takes cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart. We would follow our Master and explain the law in the light of the Sermon on the Mount. All ungodly men are prone to think sin a trifle and God's denunciation an

unmeaning threat. The devil still insinuates his infidel doubts against the truth of God's Word. "Ye shall not surely die " is whispered in every sinner's ear by him. We must denounce his falsehood, and constantly assert God's truth, the purity and unchangeableness of His law.

III. We would declare to the sinner the consequence of his sin in the punishment it entails: that the punishment is just; that it is endless in its duration; that a never-ending hell is not a human theory, but that it is based on Scripture, and as clearly revealed in Scripture as salvation from sin. We shall speak of this solemn subject with no hesitancy: in no trifling, flippant mood. We shall speak as those who know the terror of the Lord; as those who have been snatched as brands from the burning, and saved as hell-deserving sinners, and know by terrible experience what it is to feel ourselves to be in the hands of an angry God. Hell is real to us because we have felt it in our own conscience, and feared it would be our everlasting doom. We shall speak of these things with intense earnestness; our fellow-sinner's danger in an ungodly state will be an awful reality to us whenever we deal with this solemn theme. This subject, though so terrible, must not be kept back, but in the faithful discharge of our ministry we must always proclaim that " the wages of sin is death."

IV. We would continually insist on the sinner's helplessness to remedy his state by his own efforts: that he is bound hand and foot by the chains of disobedience: that

he has no power to rectify his condition no prayer or penance will avail to atone for his past sins, or blot out one transgression: that all his works are nothing worth. The best obedience of his hands will not be accepted, because it is all tarnished with sin and pride: and, moreover, it comes short of God's demands. He is a bankrupt debtor owing 10,000 talents, with nothing to pay with; therefore he is hopelessly involved, and can by no means extricate himself. This is discouraging to the guilty sinner, but it is the teaching he needs, for he wraps the flimsy rags of his own righteousness about him, and thinks they will prove a covering: he promises himself to repent and turn to God at a future time; he thinks he has the power to do so. We must show his error, strip him of his self-sufficiency, and cut the ground of his doings and willing from beneath his feet, and leave him without one refuge of his own to hide himself in; but stripped, helpless, bound, condemned, all exposed, with only one way of escape, and that not in himself at all.

V. We would ever show the sinner's only hope is in Christ: that there is no way of deliverance for the guilty but by His perfect righteousness imputed, and His sacrificial blood applied. This is the one and only way a sinner can be saved. We would preach Christ in His person: show what He is in His power to save as God. We would declare the perfection of His work; that while the sinner comes short in everything; Christ is the fulfilling end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. We would dwell on the eternal all-sufficiency of His expiatory sacrifice for guilty, helpless, sensible sinners: that His blood cleanseth

from all sin: and that while sin is damning and defiling, Christ's atonement removes every blot and charge. Someone has said, "The best way to preach sinners to Christ is to preach Christ to sinners." And thus would we open and allege that He must needs suffer; explain His work; the necessity of it; for whom it was intended; and show its security, its grand issues, its greatness, and glory. We would show its admirable suitability and adaptation to the sinner's every need. It meets all his guilt helplessness, and misery as a poor, lost, undone wretch. The whole of the Gospel scheme views man as a sinner; all its provisions are made for him as such: thus it expects no doings from him, but does all for him, and bestows all freely upon him, without merit, without price, or deserving on his part. This preaching does not laud up man's doing, but God's free grace, and Christ's worthy merit.

VI. We would explain to the sinner how these blessings are enjoyed, that they are by grace through faith. Thus we shall have to explain the nature of faith: What is its object? Who is its Author? its necessity; its experience as it is felt and exercised in the soul. We shall not shout or vociferate Believe! Believe! without showing what it is to believe: we shall be careful to point out the difference between historical belief in the Bible as a revelation of Divine truth, and that faith which is of the heart unto righteousness, a gift of God; not the bare assent of the intellect unto certain truths; but a faith which trusts all to Christ, clings to Him with all the affection of the heart, casts the soul's entire burden upon Him in unreserved dependence on His merit

and blood. We shall be careful to show the sinner that faith is not a work in any way; that his believing is not putting the top stone on Christ's work and making salvation complete thereby to himself: that while he cannot keep the perfect law, God has made another law of faith which he is to obey, and thus be saved by that. We must ever insist that faith comes empty-handed, is simply a receiving grace. It looks to Christ for all, and claims no merit of its own. We would endeavor to show the free and gracious manner in which these blessings are dispensed: that God is ready to pardon the guiltiest offender fully through Christ, and justify completely on the grounds of His merit every coming, penitent sinner, and that their coming is of His constraining grace operating on their hearts and consciences by the power of the Holy Ghost in quickening and calling them.

VII. We would joyfully tell of the blessedness of an interest in Christ, and by contrast the state of those who have no interest in Him: the security of the man who has passed from death unto life, whose guilt has been put away by the sacrifice of his great Surety; who enjoys in his breast that assurance by precious faith; whose heart is at peace with God; whose conscience is freed from those dread alarms the ungodly have; the joy which now fills his soul, which he never knew in the happiest days of his unregeneracy, nor ever yet was known by an unconverted man. The ungodly man clothes religion with melancholy, but we would show him otherwise. Then the possession of the godly man is far beyond the perishable things of earth, or all it can yield; and also the happiness found in the paths

of holiness and communion with God, which yield more real delight than all the pleasures of sin for a season. Also that the Christian has the present smile and approbation of his God, while the wicked have His frown and wrath resting upon them. And lastly, the differing prospects before the two: heaven's glory; hell's dark shades; the palm; the welcome home; the everlasting bliss with Christ! The dread depart; the companionship of devils; the worm; the never-ending torment throughout eternity! And as that judgment bar, that grand assize, is before our vision, before which preacher and people all must stand, it will cast a lurid light upon our ministry, stimulating us to faithfulness in dealing with the souls of men; it will stamp our work with grave and solemn responsibilities in view of that eternity to which we are fast hastening.