

can find something even in the outward form that will apply to their own particular case—much more in the object and meaning of the different parts. Each man, with his own peculiar temptations, joys, sorrows, may find something that suits himself; each man, like Nathanael under his fig-tree, may find the Saviour's eye fixed on him alone. We sometimes imagine that by "preaching the gospel" is meant preaching the same truth over and over again in the same words, to congregations however different from each other, under occasions however different each from each. This was not the preaching of the Gospel by Him who first preached it; even in the short compass of the Gospels every chord of the heart is struck, every infirmity of the conscience and mind is roused and soothed. Heaven and earth may pass away, but as long as a single human soul survives in the depths of eternity, in that human soul Christ's words will live, will find a hearing, will awaken a response.

And this variety is expressed and is secured by a process in itself instructive. Not by one form of teaching only, but by many. By things new and old; by discourses, such as the Sermon on the Mount; by stern truth or severe rebuke, as in the argument with the Pharisees and Sadducees; by pleasant fiction and parable, such as those He spoke on the sea-shore of Gennesareth. Remember this, all that learn and all that teach. Not by one channel only, but by many, is God's truth conveyed; one may have more attraction for one class, one for another; by some means or other, Christ would have us taught to know His Father's mind, to do His Father's will; but every one of those ways and means is after His example.

3. Consider, again, how the words, as it were, force us away from the mere letter that kills to the Spirit that gives life and lives for ever. Some of you may have heard Luther's celebrated description of St. Paul's language: "The words of St. Paul are not dead words; they are living creatures, and have hands and feet." He meant thereby to describe, and did faithfully describe, the extraordinary force and completeness of the words of that great apostle, each of which seem to have a distinctness and substance of its own. But there is something in our Lord's words higher still: we almost forget that they are words; they seem but as a transparent light in which the truth is contained. No sect has turned them into watchwords; they are almost like a soul without a body; to use His own description, "The words that He speaks to us *are spirit* and *are life*."

This peculiarity is connected with another, which the apostle himself has indicated. It is true of the Scriptures generally that they treat of general principles, not detailed applications. But this is specially true of our Lord's teaching, even in comparison with that of His own apostles. "Not I, but the Lord," says St. Paul, when he lays down the universal principle about marriage. "I, not the Lord," he says, when he gives the special application and exception. And this is brought about by the very form in which our Lord's teaching is expressed. He himself speaks of His words as the seeds cast forth by the sower. So they are. They are not mere crumbs of bread thrown down, devoured, and lost, but seeds which sink into the ground and bear fruit. But here also is His own saying true: "Except the seed die, it abideth alone; but, if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The word, the precept, the letter of this teaching often not only dies, but carries so evidently on its face the mark of death, of impossibility, of contradiction, as to tell us that not in the word itself, but in the meaning, in the life, in the spirit of the word is the real truth to be found. Like Himself, it "is not here, it is risen." Take the precepts which tell us to turn the left cheek to him that smites on the right, or to cut off our right hand when it offends us." The obedience to the letter is impossible; it throws us off to something greater, higher, wider than itself. Or take the instances of passages which appear to oppose