

cause we are all sinners, and not in joyous sympathy with the Lord.

Much defect of common sense is shown by many preachers in the selection of themes. They seem to make two or three capital errors. One is in the abundant preaching of theology. Now theology is the grammar of the Word. It is the logic of the teaching of the Bible, taken as a whole. For practical preaching, theological grammar is as much out of place as English grammar. Now and then theology is in place; but, as a rule, a minister's theology sustains a relation to his sermons similar to that held by his grammar. It is a guide for his thought, a framework for his themes. Good judgment dictates that he should imitate the sermons he finds in the Bible rather than those he finds in systematic theology. Generally speaking, the purpose of a sermon is to make some practical use of a Scripture truth. People can read their own Bibles, and probably do; and grounding them in theology is better managed by applying truth to their daily lives and everyday thoughts than explaining any dictum of the Creed. Getting themes out of the Bible for the uses of this present world, is in every age a new kind of enterprise, because the themes needed by one generation may be different from those needed by another. I do not believe that John Wesley's subjects are adapted to my generation, though I do believe that they contain sound doctrine. Wesley addressed men differently sphered and atmosphered. It is the business of the modern preacher to know where his audience is, and what sort of intellectual and moral life it is living. Let me illustrate the difference between theological preaching and common sense preaching: Take up the incident of the poor man who lost his axe-head in the presence of the prophet. A theological sermon would almost inevitably dwell on the miracle by which the axe was recovered; a common sense sermon would find more useful matter in the poor fellow's cry, "Alas! master, for it was borrowed." One might preach a sermon on "The Evil of Debt," as suggested in a recent number of this periodical; or, he might preach one on conscientiousness in handling other people's property: or he might contrast this man's instinctive grief at having lost another man's axe, with the self-satisfied indifference of people who have lost other people's fortunes. The Bible is the book of human nature as well as of the Divine nature. The common sense use of its incidents—and it is made up of incidents for the greater part—is such a use as will make the humanity of the Bible give instruction to the men of to-day. And the peculiarity of this book is that its humanity is universal and imperishable. If the guiding principle by which a preacher selects his themes be the present wants of his audience; if he is in search of some line of thought or persuasion by which he may make the living man better—he will find these lines only in the Bible. But the selection must be governed by good judgment.