

Secondly, In Preaching.—The preacher's business is to bear witness to the truth. The great solid realities of life—these are what the age requires. It does not want our doubts, but our convictions, and convictions born of truth, fact, reality.

"Give us your convictions, as for doubts we have enough of our own."—Goethe.

It does not need our speculations, theories and vagaries. It is well-stocked with these. But it wants reality. The world is full of show, and force and falseness. It cries for the real, the solid, the true. It wants not entertainment or gratification of its curiosity. It calls for truth, bread, blood, life, love. The entertaining pulpit may make mushroom congregations. We do not want mushrooms; we want trees of righteousness. We want characters that have foundations, and these are built on and built of the solemn yet glorious truths and realities of the living God, as revealed in the life and teachings of our Lord.

The world is gone wrong in the very fundamentals of life, and therefore the need of the day is for emphasis upon these foundation truths of sin—salvation. Do we preach as we ought of sin? Sin, not immorality. Sin as related to God. Sin as lovelessness. The world knows something of morality, but how false its ideas of sin. Nay, sin has no place in its code of morals. It has its gradations—murder, licentiousness, drunkenness, theft, dishonesty, and these only as offences against himself, his fellow or the state. God is not in all its thought. But what of pride, and envy, and selfishness, and unbelief? The preaching of to-day must give prominence to sin as lovelessness, sin as violation of God's law, sin as inward depravity.

How shall we thus preach, except as we know by experience? "We have known what it is to totter on the pulpit steps under a sense that the chief of sinners should scarcely be allowed to preach to others. Ah, beloved, I do not think he will ever be successful as a minister who is not taken into the depths and blackness of his own soul and made to exclaim, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Yet these were men right under God for conviction of sinners. God calls you, my brethren, to know the awful fact of sin, and witness to it.

Salvation.—If the world gets wrong regarding the fundamental fact of sin, it is but a slip to unreality in regard to salvation. If sin be but disruption of the relations between man and man, but the breaking of a statute, salvation is mere reformation, outer and superficial rectification. Sheldon's popularity reveals this trend of public thought and feeling. We must recognize the healthfulness of this ethical tendency, but woe to us, our church and the world if we fail to sound the warning note and to proclaim upon the housetops that Christ taught first forgiveness, regeneration, sanctification. Let us preach a full or bad gospel of ethics, not as rootless flowers stuck in a child's garden, but as plants that our Heavenly Father hath planted in the rich deep soil of conviction for sin, repentance, faith, forgiveness, regeneration and love for God and man, Christ a personal Saviour. But, again, how shall we witness except we know? How shall we proclaim the fullness of salvation if we know it not? Experimental preaching alone has power. (John vii, 37-39). These blessed truths must be realities to us. Preaching is an art, but it is also an incarnation. Only a vivid consciousness of these vital facts will enable us to preach with effect. Our preaching must have soul. Our preaching is too cold, too stiff, too unreal. John Foster said the sermons of Blair "got chilled through in standing too long waiting to be dressed." By all means let us have the dress, but above all let there be bones and blood and nerve and soul inside. "Lifeless preaching is a supreme blasphemy."

Again, I say the great truths as revealed in Christ's life and teaching, and as revealing the profound realities that underlie and enfold our life and destiny, must be the supreme object of the preacher's living search and the subject of his blessed knowledge and enthusiastic message.

The Bible first, and of the Bible, Christ.

Thirdly, Truth in the Life and Character.—The man of truth is not he who merely knows, believes and preaches truth, but he who lives it. A real man. The real man is the man for the age; nay, for any age. Nor what the pulpit has or says, but it determines its power. Not that we need less education, and culture, and eloquence; nay, we should have more. The need is not for the educated man, but for the unselfish and consecrated educated man.