

### PREACHING AND HEARING.

Every christian has a deep and life-long interest in the preaching of the Gospel; while to Ministers there is no subject so all-engrossing. The ostensible object of the preacher is to instruct, warn, comfort his hearers,—in short, to save and edify souls. If he aims at any lower effect he is “of all men the most miserable;” and he cannot possibly have a higher, or more benevolent aim, than that which God sets before him. The hearer of the Gospel is also under the gravest responsibilities. It is God’s Message to which he listens, and he must treat it accordingly. We have a few words to say first to *hearers*, and secondly to *preachers*:

1. Never listen to a sermon without praying for God’s blessing on the Word. The Holy Spirit alone can make the truth effectual. Without Him the most eloquent strains ever uttered by man fall fruitlessly to the ground. Pray when you enter God’s house; pray while the minister is praying, while he is preaching. Pray without ceasing.

2. Do not imagine that any personal misunderstanding or dislike between you and the Preacher will excuse you for listening carelessly or for not listening at all. He is speaking God’s Words: hear God, not man. Lift your heart above the “earthen vessel.” Pray all the more earnestly, humbly, and constantly; for there is no other way in which Satan more effectually prevents the progress of the Gospel in the heart, and in the community than by raising disputes between ministers and people, and leading the hearer to be jealous, distrustful, and unloving towards the preacher. When you feel an evil or unkind thought rising in your mind against your minister dismiss it as a temptation of Satan.

3. Do not listen to preaching without paying for it. Some have the ineffable meanness to make their dislike to the minister an excuse for not paying him, even while they continue to enjoy his services. Others conscientiously, (but with consciences ill-informed,) refrain from paying even while they continue to hear. It is proper to pay regularly and liberally towards the support of the minister whose services you enjoy.—

Your prayers and your liberality will do more good than all the complaints and murmurs you can utter.

4. Never find fault with a sermon or speak unkindly of your minister in the presence of your children or of any person whom you are likely to injure by so doing. This is a rule of vital importance. The discourse which you thought dry and tedious was the bread of heaven to more than one hungry soul. Do not then despise it: rather ask yourself, Why did I fail to enjoy that sermon?

Let us now say a few words to Ministers:

1. “Steep your sermons in your hearts before you preach them.” Much, very much depends on being in earnest, and *feeling* what you say. “Be concerned,” as Hugh Blair says, “much more to persuade than to please.” Men speaking for God have an inexpressibly solemn task to perform. God himself is an auditor and takes note of all that is spoken for Him. Dying men listen, and your words are intended for the life of their souls.

2. The grand old Christian orator Augustine has well said, “Have a care that you lose not what you have to say, while you are wholly taken up with considering how to say it artfully.” Still the *manner* of preaching is by no means to be overlooked. Long sermons are a weariness to mind and body, exhausting and injurious to the preacher and to his hearers. Beware then of *long sermons!* No one will thank you for them: they will not do more good than short ones: indeed it happens that the last half-hour or twenty minutes drive the best and most important part of the discourse out of memory. We have every reason to believe that He who taught as never man taught preached *short* sermons. We have known ministers who not only thinned their congregations but ruined their own health by preaching *too long*. We must add that, as a general rule, the longer a sermon is the poorer and weaker it is also. The great preachers of Europe and America are never lengthy. With equal truth it may be said that they are not boisterously *loud*. Undue length is not worse than undue loudness. We have heard very poor sermons delivered with a power of voice that was most