

ARTICLE IV.

IN WHAT SENSE ARE PREACHERS TO PREACH
THEMSELVES.

[by Joseph Ruggles Wilson]

There are two questions that are quite different. 1st. What is the power of *preaching*? and 2d. What is the power of *preachers*? The one refers us to preaching, considered as a divine ordinance; the other to preaching considered as to its instrumental agency. This agency is, so far as it possesses visibility, entrusted to men, who are to wield it, in God's name, each according to his own idiosyncrasies of mental and moral character. The preacher's power over those to whom he addresses the word of salvation, (whilst, indeed, it could be nothing—certainly nothing very valuable—were he not sent and sustained by the Almighty, whose servant he is yet,) greatly depends upon what *he himself is*. That is, there is a sense in which the preacher preaches *himself*. He is more than a mere *instructor*. His work does not terminate in the mere act of imparting information, of opening up truth, and causing people to know what they were before ignorant of. If he stopped here, there might be no necessity for his office; *books* could convey instruction as well, or better, and a general distribution amongst men of plain treatises upon religious subjects, might probably take the place of the living teacher. Indeed, the inquiry has been started in certain quarters, where now is the *use* of so much public preaching, seeing that the *press* is so active in sending forth ever-increasing multitudes of cheap printed volumes, whose pages teem with all the knowledge of Scripture that is needed by the reading masses? The answer to this query is not alone to be found in the fact that there are many who *cannot* read, and therefore must be orally taught; or in the very different fact that *God having instituted preaching* as the means for drawing souls to himself, will own only his own ordinance in effecting this great result. The truer and profounder answer is, that they who favor this suggestion altogether mistake the *nature* of a preaching office; regarding it as nothing more than a *teaching* office. They leave *this* entirely out of the ac-

count, viz.: that the preacher is a man who employs sacred truth as a vehicle through which he brings *his own peculiar distinctive self* to bear upon his fellow men. That truth is with him not mere knowledge, but this knowledge woven into his own experiences, and it is these *experiences* which he seeks to impress upon others in a way that shall make them their experiences as well. He publishes salvation as he himself understands it, and as he has come to understand it thoroughly by having imbibed it into his own soul. Hence he says, "I *believe*, there I *speak*." From the storehouse of his own convictions he strives to convince. It is these convictions that constitute him a preacher at all; and in proportion to their warmth and strength is he a *mighty* preacher. Is it not so with all oratory? Why do men ever address other men in public harangue—and how do they do this successfully—unless it be because, rising higher than mere lesson-mongers, they are prepared to inject *themselves* (in whom the truths they teach have become inwrought as so much living force,) *into their auditors*. Accordingly, the demand for orators never ceases, notwithstanding that they may have nothing *new* to tell; and never can cease until *sympathy* shall fail as a power that brings minds together and moulds them into the pattern of the strongest. Much of the power of the *preacher* is, then, to be found in this, that he is himself a reproduction of the truth he utters; its reproduction in personal form. He is supposed to have it within himself as a living reality; a glowing enthusiasm; a fresh kindling by the Holy Ghost; and so he moves upon his audience with something of the force of an original revelation. It is not Christ *only* that he preaches, but Christ *in him*; and this gives to his preaching a vital energy which the dead letter of a book—even though that book be the Bible—does not and cannot possess.

It is well for us to understand, if we can, that every true preacher is thus a power independently of the power of his *theme*; or rather is a power *added* of that of the mighty theme which is supposed to possess him. He is that theme, *plus himself*, and the whole weight of his oratory which the theme inspires. Think of some preacher—say Thomas Chalmers—and try to account for the effects he produced upon all, the cultivated and the unlettered

who heard him. What was it that swayed them? His massive form—his broad, beaming face—his thunderous voice—his active gesticulation—his argument—his wealth of illustration—his passion—his benevolence—his lofty piety? It was all these qualities and circumstances combined. It was not his statements of truth; they are as well stated in his writings, which produce no such effect upon the mind. It was the *preacher* pouring forth his own interior self, after that self had been filled with the knowledge, and fired by the love of truth, and who was instinct with the purpose to convey to others *what he* knew and felt, and *as* he knew and felt. Or, take a higher example: that of our blessed Lord. Undoubtedly his personal presence produced an effect which his sayings abstractedly studied never could produce. The *utterer* was more than the *utterance*. The soul which he gave to his words told where the words themselves would have fallen unheeded. It was when these were accompanied by those tones of voice which thrilled with so deep an affection for men, and so high a reverence for the eternal Father—by these meltings and flashings of the eye, which betokened a fountain of light and flame within—by the whole manner and grace displayed in the gentle but yet lordly carriage of this Prince of orators—it was when Christ's words were thus attended and enforced by the living speaker, each one of whose thoughts was *a part of himself*, that the officers of the Sanhedrin, who were sent to arrest him, were compelled to return, astonished, saying, "*never man spake like this man.*" The *man* impressed where the doctrine could not. The same is true even when the preacher is a very common man, like any of ourselves. The instance of the Saviour places before our minds the idea we are endeavoring to express in the largest view; but similar instances, though on a far smaller scale, are every day being witnessed. We know how it was in England, when the immediate followers of Wesley, many of them without literary cultivation, stirred the hearts of thousands wherever they went with the gospel on their tongues. Their speech was rude, but the speakers were identified with their subject. They spake *themselves* to the people, and brought multitudes of them into conformity, so to speak, with their own personality; so that the

type of that day's piety was the type which the *preachers* presented; a piety somewhat distorted, it is true; but yet, such as it was, it was what came from the power of the men who proclaimed it in the form of their own consuming love for Christ. It was *their conception* of the Lord Jesus Christ that they preached; and that conception became the common property of myriads. In point of fact, then, no two men preach precisely the same gospel, provided their preaching is in all earnestness, and not merely as a bundle of cold dogmas. Paul did not preach it exactly as did Peter—nor John as did James. These all felt it intensely—but each felt it in his own way; we mean as it was moulded in his own peculiarities. It is so still. Although Christ must be regarded as always one and the same, it does not follow that whoever preaches him must present in all respects the very same Saviour. To use the illustration of another: “You might just as well say that the sun being always one and the same, whatever *flower* showed the sun's work must look the same. When you look at the flowers, you will see some red, some blue, some yellow, some humble, some high, some branching. Endless is the work the sun creates; but every one of the things which it creates reflects its power and teaches something about it. It takes a thousand men's experience, all brought into one ideal, to make the conception of our Lord. You may read what Paul wrote about him, or Matthew, or Luke, or John; and the impression produced by either of them is fragmentary; it is presenting *some things* out of the infinite, as he was made to see them. So, when, under the gospel, men are made preachers, God works in them a saving knowledge of himself, gives them a sense of the sympathy between God and man, of the spiritual love which appeals from the infinite to the mortal; and then says to each of them: “Take this revelation of Jesus Christ in you, and go out and preach it. According to the structure of your understanding, your emotive affections, the sentiments of your own soul; go and preach to men for the sake of making them know the love of Christ Jesus—and you will have a power in you, if attended by the Holy Ghost, to make that preaching effective. . . .It is your office, as preachers, to take so much of Christ as has been digested into

your own spiritual life; and with that strike! with that, flash! with that, burn men!” “It is historically true, that Christianity did not, in its beginning, succeed by the force of its doctrines, but by the *lives* of its disciples.” It must *always* be so; and, inasmuch as these lives are supposed to be paramount in the preaching class, it is mainly by the power of what religion, of what practical godliness, of what personally absorbed divine truth dwells in them, and comes out from them, in their utterances of it by example and by word, that the world is moved heavenward. When, however, we say there is a sense in which every effective preacher is effective in proportion to the extent in which he preaches *himself*, you will observe that this statement must be taken along with a warning. We have already intimated *what self* it is that he must employ as a power: that self, namely, which has *Christ* wrought into it. Has, then, every man a number of selves? Certainly he has. Paul, *e.g.*, in the 7th of Romans, speaks of at least *two* selves as belonging to him; one the old, the other the new. But both that old and that new self has, in a Christian, several sides or aspects; their variety depending upon constitutional singularities. Without stopping to speak of these at length, it is sufficient to say that the *old* and *new* man—these *antagonistic* selves—are only too apt to change places, in preachers as in other men; and as sure as they do, the power is gone from their preaching. The true preacher is the *new* man of his soul, which alone carries Christ, and which alone can *proclaim* Christ as the object of faith, the hope of salvation; because it is only this new man that can truthfully say, “for me to live *is* Christ.” To this heaven-born man belongs the Samson’s hair, which, if shorn off in the Delilah’s lap of the old man, deprives it of all its strength. Our point is, that *self-preaching* is, in the meaning we are now attaching to the phrase, far removed from *self-seeking*, from all *egotism*, and from whatever in personal ambition it may be which leads a person to obtrude his own opinions, or his own dogmas, as a substitute for the gospel. It must never be forgotten that nothing has saving power over men, *except the gospel*. But then there is this added thought, that the gospel has then its *maximum* power when he who publishes it

does so out of the fulness of *his own heart*; *i.e.*, when he gives it the tongue of *his own* earnest persuasion of its truth; not *another* man's persuasion, but *his*. In other words, preaching is not an *imitative* exercise. Every preacher is to regard himself as an *original* exhibitor and enforcer of the terms of human salvation; a channel of gracious speech, markedly different from every other. He may, if he please, take another preacher for his *model*, but ought not to do so in any such way as shall deprive him of the advantages of his own individuality. He must still employ whatever characteristics of mind or manner are exclusively his own. He, indeed, *will* do so, if he be true to his calling; a calling which summoned *him*, and not *another in him*, to the sacred desk.

Let us extend a little the subject in hand. Every candidate ought *practically* to consider it, in reference to his studies preparatory to his entrance upon the actual work of the ministry, and every preacher in view of his studies when he shall have been inducted into his great office.

Our first remark, then, is, that it will be his duty to make the *most* of himself, in direct reference to his sacred calling. If he himself is to be a power in the pulpit, certainly he cannot take too much pains to *perfect* this power. It probably is because ministers—young ministers especially—are so commonly urged to regard themselves as mere nothings—as humble instruments whose humility requires them to esteem their own endowments in the light of a *snare* rather than in the light of a substantial and positive force—that they are accustomed to put forth only feebly what they really are, and to make little or no effort in the way of asserting their efficiency. We are, as truly as any one can be, a foe to ministerial arrogance, and would be far from advising any preacher to think of himself more highly than he ought. But modesty as men is one thing, and timorousness as preachers is quite another; and all are timorous who fail to perceive that they, in themselves, are an influence in the Church and the world. *Believing* that they are weak, they become weaklings indeed. Assuming, then, that the preacher is to be a positive agency for good in the hand of God, 1st, because he is a Christian; 2d, be-

cause he is set apart as a Christian *minister*, what ought he to strive after? Why, to make of himself all that it is possible for him to become, *in the direction of his immediate calling*. Remembering that it is *he* who preaches, not someone else through him; reflecting that the Holy Ghost has chosen *him*, and not, in him, some one else whom he might be supposed to represent; it must be felt by each chosen ambassador for Christ, that it is *he* who shall accomplish the enterprise he is set to achieve; the enterprise of saving souls and edifying saints within the sphere appointed to him. *He* is God's spokesman—and *he* it is who is to impress the people whom he addresses with the lessons of eternal life. Accordingly, as he is, so will they be likely to be; a sentiment that expresses in another form, the familiar saying, "like priest like people." Let each, then, make himself a principal study—just as an aspiring mechanic studies, in order to perfect, the parts of his chief tool. The board is planed well or ill in the proportion in which the plane is good or bad. A perfect plane—ordinary skill being assumed—brings forth a faultless surface upon the subservient wood. *Ourselves* are our chief tool in all the labor we perform; and in the results of that labor ourselves are necessarily reproduced. Thus we come back again to the principal thought of this article, and venture to say once more to all preachers: preach *yourselves*—but now with this addition: preach yourselves in a constant progress of improvement. You have deficiencies; mental, moral, spiritual; physical, too, it may be. Take these in hand—find out precisely what they are—proceed to remove them, and to substitute in their stead, so far as you can, the corresponding finish. In other words, be not content until the workman is worthy of his work. Become those living epistles of which an apostle speaks to be known and read of all men—so that the dead letter may seem as if raised to life in your speech, in your example, in all that you *are*, as the servants of God. Thus will you be, each, the power you were *intended* to be by him who chose you as his heralds of peace. The *preacher* is more of a sermon than any or all of his worded deliverances. Those deliverances are, indeed, almost powerless unless they display the *man* who utters them; unless they thrill

with an energy derived from what *he himself* is, and burn with a fire which proceeds from his own soul, kindled by intelligence and piety. Turn it which way we will, the conclusion is always before us, the preacher's preaching is just another form of *himself*; *i.e.*, if he does *his own thinking*; exhibits no emotions that he does not actually *feel*; and presents divine truth, not as a bundle of opinions which orthodoxy has agreed upon, but as so much vital blood that has been made to course in *his veins*, and therefore takes the form of his own Christian *life*. It is these *live* men whom God supremely calls; men who have *eaten* the word, as a prophet did, and into whom it has passed to become a perpetual throb in their hearts; so that when it comes forth again, it will proceed upon its errand, bearing the warmth of their innermost experiences; those experiences wherein are traced the musings which continued until they could find vent only in fire; the fire that burns quickly into other souls, melts where it burns, and remoulds where it melts.

Another remark is hereby suggested. We have said that, in order to true and high efficiency, the preacher must study himself. He is, indeed, expected to weary himself among Hebrew roots and in exploring Greek meanings; to extend his knowledge of Church History and Government; to knit together, in a comprehensive system, the doctrines of salvation by a course of didactic and polemic theology; and to discover those principles of sacred rhetoric which shall enable him properly to reproduce, upon the actual field of his ministry, what he shall have acquired. Nothing is more important than a diligent use of his time in the effort to utilise his whole opportunity for study and research with respect to all these grave matters. But how is he best to direct such a prolonged effort, in order to reap the fullest advantage in view of what is before him in his official life? In other words, what is the true *use* of all his various studies? Is it his object to gain knowledge? Surely, yes. Is it his further object to discipline his understanding? Unquestionably this, too. Is this, however, the whole? We do not hesitate to say that the importance of abstract knowledge and of mental culture, is exceeded by the necessity imposed upon the man of making what he is evermore ac-

quiring, a *part of himself*, in the strictest sense of these words. The achievements of a student are usually spoken of as supplying him with so much mental *furniture*. We dare say that in the cases of most students this word is judiciously chosen. Their minds are so many rooms, in which, like apartments in a dwelling, they have placed a good deal of suitable furniture. These rooms are sometimes, it may be, comparable to parlors wherein you find whatever is pleasing to the eye and soft to the touch; sometimes to those portions of the home where things useful rather than ornamental are collected. But our complaint as to this word, "furniture," is that it does not rightly designate the true results of learning. Furniture is something that is not necessarily identified with the room where it is placed. It is by no means an inseparable portion of the chamber or the house; to such an extent that the destruction of the one would be the inevitable ruin of the other. Every cultivated mind does, indeed, possess a portion of such furniture, which is movable, which can be disposed of, and forgotten. In the crowds which people his memory, there are many items of knowledge that are present only incidentally, or as temporary guests—and which he may or may not make use of, as one may of a table on which he leans for a moment, or of a chair on which he reposes a little, or of a servant whom he despatches on some present errand. But within this circle stands *himself*, the master of all these externals. What, however, constitutes *himself*? He is the *product* of his studies—the *excellent* product, if he has studied well. What he has read, and heard, and pondered, has entered into his very composition, mental and moral; has *blooded* him, so to speak, through all the veins of his being, and now give to his judgment whatever vigor it has, to his thoughts whatever vitality, to his imagination whatever colors they possess, and to his career whatever usefulness it exhibits. It is not therefore mental *furniture* that he has acquired, but *mind itself*. Not merely are his original powers enlarged and improved by the healthful exercise they have had; they are *recreated* by being poured into a different mould, and restamped by a different image. The man and his acquirements have become *assimilated* by the operation of the laws of that mysterious or-

ganic chemistry which reign in the world of soul. Such ought to be the final cause of all the preachers' intellectual labor. He is to pursue theology in all its branches, not only that he may acquire the knowledge of doctrine, or become acquainted with the history of opinion with reference to doctrine. This is needful. Far more needful is it that he take what he has learned *into himself*, in such a way as that no longer is it something external, but internal; not the mere crudities of tabled food, but that food digested into inward life; so that he is enabled to say, "these doctrines are mine; are *myself*; these opinions are also portions of me—not what I have been taught, but my own thinking—not what has been pumped into me, but *my pump*, out of which I give forth my very personality. It is only thus, it seems to us, that he can make any real progress; by weaving all threads into the warp and woof of his own existence; the resulting pattern being himself; the living doctrines in an original spring. When such a man preaches, he cannot but preach himself in a manner that shall be felt in a degree proportioned to the extent in which the truth and he are *one*. His words, his gestures, his changing countenance, his tones of voice, his whole bearing in the pulpit, will declare at once the fixedness and the warmth of his convictions, as convictions that ought to be those of all others. Who, indeed, would be a preacher, unless he were conscious of the transformation which has constructed him, in his measure, into the Saviour he proclaims; so that he pleads not only the cause of God, but his own cause as well? Is not every minister a redeemer of men; a small specimen of what his Lord is on the largest scale? As such, in imitation of Christ, he toils, suffers, and is crucified for the world!—"counting not his life dear unto himself, so that he may finish his course with joy and the ministry which he has received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." And although Paul did indeed say, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake," yet he adds, "for God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give (in order that we may thus give) the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The apostles did not preach themselves in the offensive sense that the Judaizers of that day did, as if *potential* salvation was with them, but they preached themselves as the bearers of that light which, as it shone from their persons and discourses, was all one with the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. God had clothed them with the gospel radiance, not as if they were so many *suns*, and thus independent fountains of light. They were, nevertheless, those sources of light which, like the planets, borrowed the beams that made them *exactly like* their supreme original; and their office was, accordingly, to illuminate the earth's night in the absence of him who appointed them his light-bearers. So that Paul could also say: "Brethren, be followers together of *me*, and mark them which walk, so as ye have *us* for an ensample."

We care not further to expand these hints. Let them be taken for what they are worth; and, properly understood, we are bold to say they are worth much. They serve our present object at least, which was, in a way somewhat different than has been attempted heretofore, to display the power that *preachers* have, or may have, when fully absorbed by their theme and in their work, and thus to justify God's calling of men to go forth in the effort to achieve salvation for a lost world. We leave it to every one's own intelligence, not to misunderstand what has been suggested—as if we were teaching the preacher to aim at the utmost effort of *self-assertion* for selfish ends. Our whole thought is: become what you preach, and then preach *Christ in you*, the hope of glory. So will each one be a separate power in the midst of his generation, for everlasting good.