

Francis Grimké

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 May 2024

Preacher: Colin Horne

- [0 : 0 0] So let's look at a little family history this morning, and let's consider the life of Francis Grimke. Okay, we looked at months ago, but we looked at John Bunyan.
- By show of hands, who had heard of John Bunyan before we learned of him? Many of us, all right? How about Jan Hus? Okay, many, many.
- Francis Grimke. Ha-ha, I win. Okay, I saw one there. All right. Francis Grimke. Yeah, well, until a couple years ago, I had never heard of him. And it wasn't until I received a small book that was just packed full of quotes from him.
- It was a book I received from a conference that I didn't attend because of COVID, but I got the book. It got mailed to me. And I profited immensely from it, learning of him, learning of his life.
- And so I thought it would do us well to learn of him as well. So Francis Grimke. He was a prominent black Presbyterian pastor who pastored in the late 1800s and early 1900s.
- [1 : 0 7] And because of his reformed doctrine, his congregation would affectionately call him the Black Puritan. Now, considering the time period in which he lived, he was born in 1850.
- So he saw a lot in his life here in America. He lived during a time in our history where men and women, black men and women, were greatly oppressed.
- They were mistreated as slaves. And then even after gaining their freedom, their mistreatment continued under the Jim Crow laws. So especially in his childhood, but all through his life, Grimke endured great hardship and suffering.
- Now, before I share about his life, I thought it fitting to introduce him with his own words. So we're going to simply let him speak for himself. We're going to fast forward in his life to the age of 69.
- So World War I has just finished. Again, he lived through much. He's born before the Civil War. He lives through World War I. The year is 1919.
- [2 : 1 0] So the war has just ended, and its impact is very much being felt in America at this time. Now, Grimke was invited to speak at Howard University.
- And here is the topic that was assigned to him. The role of religion in the post-war reconstruction of society. The role of religion in the post-war reconstruction of society.
- But as we'll hear from Grimke, his focus was much larger than rebuilding society after the Great War. This is what he said in his address.
- The question for the church to consider, not only now as a matter of reconstruction in view of conditions induced by the war, but to be considered at all times is, What can it do to bring men to repentance and faith and to build them up in holiness of heart and life?
- What can it do to save sinners, to turn them from darkness to light and from sin and Satan to God and holiness? That is the question that concerns it. Fortunately, in seeking to answer that question, we are not left to human wisdom, to the devices of men.

[3 : 22] God himself has answered the question for us. God himself has clearly set forth in his word how the thing is to be done. We can't improve on his method, and if the church is wise, it will follow it closely, letting everything else go.

Now, we don't have time for his entire address. We're going to skip to the end. This is how he concluded. At the very end, he said, All this talk of reconstruction, to my mind, is scarcely more than a passing fad, a mere effervescence on the surface, an effort to seem to be doing something new.

Only as the old, old story of the cross is relied upon and presented with ever-increasing clearness and power will men be saved. No newfangled notions or methods will amount to anything.

When this work of spiritual reconstruction is over, it will reduce itself ultimately to the old way of teaching and inspiring men along the lines set forth in the word of God with Jesus Christ and his ideals as the great objective.

And then he quoted Matthew 7, verses 24 and 25. Whoever, Jesus said, heareth these words of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock.

[4 : 38] And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And then he said, Work built upon that foundation needs no reconstruction.

So that's a flavor of the kind of man that Francis Grimke was. His aim in life, his driving desire was to see sinners saved and to see Christ magnified.

So there's much that we can learn from him. Well, Grimke was born in the year 1850 on a plantation in Charleston, South Carolina, which is really interesting to me and very exciting because Casey and I tomorrow are leaving for a trip for our 10-year anniversary, and we are going to Charleston, South Carolina.

So I didn't realize that until I'm reading up on him, so we're going to have to look and see if we can find some history related to Francis Grimke. His father, Henry, was a wealthy white lawyer, and his mother, Nancy, was an African-American slave who was owned by his father.

It was after Henry had become a widower that he began a relationship with Nancy. She would obviously become more than a slave to him, though obviously never married in that time period.

[6 : 04] They were domestic partners. They moved out of the city where Henry practiced law to the country to live on the plantation where Francis was eventually born.

And it was here that the family was seeking more privacy for their lives. Francis, along with his two brothers, Archibald and John, would learn to read and write there on the plantation.

And yet while Francis was raised in a situation that granted him certain opportunities and freedoms that other black children would not have enjoyed at that time, Francis still did have a difficult life.

Only a couple of years after Francis' birth, his father died of yellow fever. So Francis and his two brothers, along with their mother, they experienced a measure of freedom for several years.

Henry actually transferred ownership of Francis and his siblings and his mother to Henry's son, Montague, who obviously would have been Francis' half-brother.

[7 : 02] So he gave them to his son, and Henry had done this with the expectation that Montague would allow them to remain free with, as one biographer put it, nominal oversight.

In his will, he specifically stated that they should be, quote, treated as members of the family, end quote. And while they were never treated by Montague like that, for several years, they did enjoy a form of freedom.

Montague allowed them to all live in their own house as free blacks in Charleston, or in the free black section of Charleston. During this time, Francis and his brothers were able to attend a public school.

And in 1860, when Francis was around 10, all of that changed. Montague got married. His wife wanted more servants. And because Montague did technically own Francis and his mother and his brothers, Montague exercised his property rights.

And he basically re-enslaved all of them. In 1862, when Francis was around 12, the Civil War broke out. And in the winter of 1862, Charleston was besieged by Union troops.

[8 : 14] Now, for Archibald and for Francis, this siege was the perfect distraction to enable them to escape from Montague. And this is what Francis did.

He actually joined, not the Union army, but the Confederate army. And he became an assistant to an officer. That is a little confusing, but that is how it goes.

And soon he was discovered to be a runaway slave, and he was jailed for a time before then being returned to Montague. Montague then sold Francis to another Confederate officer.

And like before, Francis ran away from him. The Civil War obviously came to an end in 1865, and Francis found himself a free man, though still without a penny to his name.

So Francis and his brothers would continue their education after the war. And because they had been educated throughout their childhood, they stood out to their teachers. And support was raised for Francis and Archibald to go up north to Pennsylvania and to study at Lincoln University, a historically black college founded just a year before the Civil War ended by an abolitionist or by abolitionist Presbyterians.

[9 : 28] It was here at school that Francis came to profess faith in Christ. Now, while Lincoln, two white abolitionists named Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Moore Grimke took note of Archibald and Francis because they shared a name.

And they tried to figure out, who are these boys? Do we have some kind of family connection to them? And they did. They found out that the boys were their nephews. And so in this really interesting, wonderful twist, Henry's desire for his boys was ultimately realized.

They were treated as members of the family by their two aunts. They took them in, welcomed them into their homes, and they did treat them as members of the family.

Francis and Archibald would graduate from Lincoln University in 1870. And Francis would then go on to study at Princeton Theological Seminary back when it was a solid theological school.

Now, prior to enrolling in Princeton, let's pause for just a moment in advancing through Francis Grimke's life, and let's talk about the fact that he wrestled much with his sense of calling.

[10 : 41] He was considering a career in law for some time. He actually went so far as to enroll at Howard University to pursue a law degree in 1872.

But then God brought a pastor into Grimke's life, and that pastor's influence would greatly change Grimke's future. That pastor's name was John B. Reeve, and he pastored Central Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.

And he would be the one to steer Grimke away from pursuing his degree in law and towards pastoral ministry. Grimke became a member of Central Church, where Reeve pastored.

And he would go on to then be recommended to the Philadelphia Presbytery as a candidate for ministry. And on the very same day that that happened, he enrolled at Princeton.

Now, while Grimke was at Princeton, he was influenced there as well by a very prominent theologian, Charles Hodge. Grimke actually had the privilege of learning under Hodge just before Hodge retired.

[11 : 47] He was the last class that got to have all three of Hodge's theological courses with Hodge teaching them. So very exciting time for him to sit under his teaching.

And it was in that context that Grimke came to embrace Reformed doctrine. And resulting from that, he developed a high view of Scripture, which is not shared by all at that time.

He would later say this, When we speak of the Bible as the Word of God, we mean that the men who wrote it were supernaturally guided in what they wrote. They were used as agents by the Holy Spirit to communicate truth and to record facts for the guidance of humanity.

What they wrote, therefore, is to be received as true on the authority of the Holy Spirit. Grimke would go on to graduate from Princeton in 1876.

Now that year, 1876, was an important year for Grimke. Lots of major events happened in his life. He got married to a woman named Charles Fortin. She was an extremely accomplished woman, as both an abolitionist and as a teacher.

[12 : 57] She was the granddaughter of a prominent member of the free black elite in Philadelphia. Francis and Charlotte had a daughter together. But sadly, their daughter died as an infant.

So Grimke actually spent most all of his adult life without children. So 1786, he was married that year. He also graduated from Princeton that year, and he accepted a call to pastor a church that very same year.

The church that he was called to pastor was a very well-known church in Washington, D.C., 15th Street Presbyterian Church. Now this church was familiar to him.

Even before he came to pastor, he actually had preached there the summer before his senior year. And Grimke himself described the church as, the most intellectual and cultured group of colored people to be found anywhere in the country at that time.

It necessitated on my part hard study and the most careful preparation of my sermons. End quote. He would go on to pastor that church until 1928, spanning 50 years of ministry.

[14 : 07] He only briefly took four years off while his wife was ill to go live in Florida with her until she recovered. And then when she was well again, they went right back to Washington, D.C.

and he preached and shepherded that flock faithfully all of those years. And as he shepherded, as he did that faithfully, he looked to the word of God. And he looked to it to address one of the most grievous sins of his day, racial discrimination and brutal mistreatment of African Americans.

Though slavery had ended, prejudice and racism continued to abound, and Grimke himself actually experienced discrimination from within his own denomination.

On a trip down south for a gathering of churches, he wasn't allowed to eat and to sleep in the same quarters as white pastors. So Grimke spoke very directly against the sin of racism.

He was bold, but he also was looking to the word to address it. This is what he once said in a sermon. There must be careful instruction. The great principles of Christianity that are opposed to race prejudice.

[15 : 18] Everything in the word of God that runs counter to it, that tends to set it forth in its true light as a thing most hateful to God and injurious to man should be carefully set forth.

Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, some teaching must be done. Careful, painstaking instruction as to the mind of God on this matter, as revealed in his character and in the teachings of his word must be given.

If race prejudice is wrong, if it is unchristian, unbrotherly, then that fact ought to be declared. There ought to be no blinking on the matter, no dodging on the issue.

So Grimke would preach on the unity between white men and black men that should be apparent in the church, just as it was among Jews and Gentiles in the early church. And he would preach on Jesus' mistreatment or his proper treatment of the Samaritan woman and how countercultural it was that he would engage with her, have a conversation with her, that he would seek even to have water given by her.

He would preach on the image of God from Genesis 1 to demonstrate that all men ought to be treated the same. As one scholar would say, for Grimke, the Bible's clear teaching about the doctrine of the image of God and the brotherhood of believers meant racism should have no place inside the church.

[16 : 46] The church should be salt and light in the world. It should stand apart from the world by the grace of God. So he would say this in one of his sermons. It is important, it seems to me, not only in dealing with race prejudice, but in dealing with every other evil, that Christian men and women should understand that Christianity is not clay in the hands of the world's spirit to be molded by it, but is itself to be the molder of public sentiment and everything else.

It isn't the meal, but the leaven put into the meal, that is to leaven the whole lump. It is salt, not salt that has lost its savor, but the salt of the earth that is intended to arrest corruption, to put an end to the forces that mean moral decay, that tend to break down the tissues of spiritual life and to degenerate into festering sores of race prejudice and all the other broods of evils that grow out of it.

The mission of the church, of Christian men and women, is to mold, not to be molded by encircling influences of evil. To the shame of millions of white Christians in this land, the brother in black is still a social and religious outcast.

He was bold. He was unapologetic. And he was also thoroughly biblical. Where was his starting point? We think about even today, race relations in America.

That is a hot button issue. Where is often the starting point in America today? Movements begun in the world, social theories promoted by the world.

[18 : 22] That's not where Francis Grimke went. Where did Francis Grimke go? Well, careful exploration of God's word. What does God have to say about this?

So he looked to the word. He did that in his pastoral ministry. He earned a reputation as a great preacher who faithfully taught from the word. He wanted to be included among those preachers who, quote, believed firmly in the scriptures as the word of God and who faithfully preached the truth therein contained in dependence upon the Holy Spirit to give efficacy to the truth, end quote.

So he labored for 50 years, shepherding this flock, seeking to feed them the truth of God's word each week. And that imagery of a shepherd caring for his sheep is exactly how Grimke viewed his ministry.

He said this, The main business of the minister each week is to be searching the scriptures with a view of gathering food, spiritual food for the members of his flock and all others who may be present at the public services.

He is the shepherd of the flock and it is his business, the responsibility is his to lead his flock ever into green pastures and beside still waters.

[19 : 43] And this he will be able to do only as he is a careful and prayerful student of the word. And I love how this mentality that he had, he didn't just keep to himself, but he sought to also influence other younger ministers who were coming up behind him.

He sought to help them to see how they too were to shepherd the flock. So one young minister then said this once to Grimke, I am coming more and more to see the importance of what you have said.

I am realizing more and more that the only substantial food upon which to feed the people in order to make them strong, to build them up in Christian character is on the pure, unadulterated word of God.

Thank the Lord for the example of Grimke, that younger ministers coming up behind him, living in a time where liberal Christianity was on the rise and here he was saying, look to the word, feed them with the word, feed them with the word.

So if he was an encouragement to other pastors, if he was pointing them to the, if he was giving positive feedback, this is how you ought to be pastoring, he was also quick to give criticism when he saw pastoring done poorly.

[21 : 00] We want to hear something of that as well. He was bold in that criticism. And so he would say this regarding pastors who did not preach from God's word.

It is amazing how much husk is given out from many of our pulpits week after week. Instead of searching the scriptures, earnestly and prayerfully endeavoring to discover and to bring out its rich treasures of wisdom and knowledge, we find the occupants of them ransacking papers, magazines, periodicals of one kind and another in search of something novel, something strange to talk about, forgetful of the fact that they are not in the pulpit to entertain people, to help them to while away their leisure moments, nor to keep them informed as to secular matters, but to feed their souls with the bread of life, to keep before them the things of enduring value, which tend to build them up in holiness and comfort, to use its high and sacred privileges and opportunities for any other purposes than that for which they were designed is a betrayal of one's trust for which God will certainly hold us responsible.

He went so far as to say this, if we are not feeding the flock, if we are not calling sinners to repentance, if these things are not uppermost with us, we are out of place in the pulpit.

We have no business in the sacred desk. Grimke said those words over a hundred years ago, but they still hold true even for the modern church today.

John MacArthur, many of us familiar with him, a modern day pastor and author, he says this in his book, Not Ashamed of the Gospel. There seems almost no limit to what modern church leaders will do to entice people who aren't interested in worship and preaching.

[22 : 57] Too many have thought the notion, have bought the notion that the church must win people by offering an alternative form of entertainment. It's almost as though John MacArthur was reading Francis Grimke.

So Grimke was convinced that the man who pastors the flock must see that he has this high calling in pastoring, that he speaks as God's messenger, that he's the vessel through which God's word goes out.

And so Grimke said this, in preaching, it is well for us always to carry with us the thought that it is God who is speaking through us, that we are only his agents, and also to preach in such a way that the people also will get the same thought that we are speaking for God.

So Grimke was very concerned both with the character of the preacher and with the quality of the preaching. That time that is spent speaking to the people of God on Sunday mornings was precious to him.

He was very careful and intentional with how he spent that time, how he used his time in the pulpit. It mattered to him. In fact, he went so far as to say this, I have during all my ministry never used the pulpit to chastise my enemies, to vent my spleen on those who excited my displeasure.

[24 : 20] That is one way to say it. That is a good model to follow in preaching. Don't go venting your spleen. I don't even know why that's a, is that a saying? Venting your spleen on those who excited, like somebody will have to tell me about that.

I had a roommate once whose spleen got burst and that's all I know is that it was very life-threatening. That's all I know about the spleen. So go vent your spleen. Well, I know that we've spent a decent amount of time talking about Grimke's views on preaching.

Why it mattered to him. Why is that? Why did it matter so much? Because we need to be reminded ourselves as well of what a treasure it is that we have God's word.

Grimke put such a high premium on preaching because it's the word of God that he preached. Grimke believed preaching was a sacred task because it was a sacred book that was to be preached, given to us by a divine author.

And so while we may not all be preaching from this book regularly, we are or we should be hearing it preached regularly and we should be in it ourselves, reading it regularly.

[25 : 40] So Grimke's words are a good reminder to us to take God's word seriously, to hold it in high regard in our lives because it is the very words of God to us.

So we all may not be preachers of the word, but we all are hearers, we all are readers of that word. In Paul's second letter to his child in the faith, the young pastor Timothy, Paul says this in chapter four, I charge you in the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word.

Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke and exhort with complete patience and teaching.

You can see where Grimke was rooted in God's word. These words from scripture, they are directed to those who preach, but this is a word for all of us who are Christians.

We ought to sit under the preaching of the word. We ought to hear it week in and week out as it should then feed us. We should be reprov'd, rebuked, and exhorted by the preaching of the word.

[26 : 57] Not because the sermons that we hear are powerful displays of oratory skill. If you join us this evening, and I encourage you to, we're starting a new sermon series in 1 Corinthians.

And we're going to see in the coming weeks from that inspired letter written by Paul that powerful displays of oratory skill is not how we are fed. We're going to see that clearly from 1 Corinthians.

We are fed week in and week out when the sermons that we hear are unpacking the truth of God's word. Paul exhorted Timothy not just to preach any thought that came to his mind.

Paul exhorted Timothy not just to be a skilled public speaker or a proclaimer of man's words. He exhorted Timothy, preach the word.

And that was Francis Grimke's aim as well. So Grimke helps us to remember that sermons should feed the flock from the word. We should be encouraged. We should be convicted.

[27 : 57] We should be moved to action. Our hearts and affections should be stirred for Christ. He should be presented to us plainly. We should be reminded of our need to fight against sin.

All of these things and much more. And the foundations for those kinds of sermons are only found in God's word. Here is what the word has to say to us this morning.

So as Grimke himself said, what people need is to hear the word of God and not the wisdom of men. And then in another sermon he would say, what a book the Bible is.

Where in all the world's literature will you find such a storehouse of knowledge and wisdom? Where will you find such sublime ideas about God, such noble standards of living?

Open it anywhere. And the light flashes in upon us as from no other source. And then he would go on to say, And yet, how often we find men in our pulpits searching heaven and earth for something new to preach about, while this treasure house of wisdom and knowledge of the things necessary to salvation is neglected, passed over, and overlooked.

[29 : 14] When I was in school, a family member of mine, not my parents, but somebody who I loved dearly, who loved me dearly, would seek to help me to grow in my preaching ability.

Perhaps he was listening to sermons I was preaching at the time. And he would pass along sermons to me because he wanted to help me to grow. And he would often say, this is a great sermon.

And then I would ask, why is it great? What makes it great? And he would give a variety of answers. Or the preacher had a clever hook at the beginning that really drew the audience in.

Or the preacher was very clear in his outline. He communicated it well. Or the preacher had an illustration that was memorable and really helped the listeners to hold on to the point. Those can all be helpful elements of preaching.

I've used all of those elements in preaching and still do. But sometimes those sermons that were passed along to me were missing a key ingredient, without which it didn't matter how clever the hook was or how clear the outline was or how memorable the illustrations were.

[30 : 23] Some of those sermons were missing the Word of God. There's a lot of factors that we can talk about that make for a great sermon. But there is no such thing as a great sermon that is devoid of God's Word.

There's no such thing as a great sermon that doesn't get our noses into the text to see the God of the Word all the more clearly in all of His perfection.

The God who took on flesh and as a man died in our place to bring us to Himself and for the forgiveness of our sins. There's no such thing as a great sermon without His Word which shows us Christ at the center.

I hope Francis Grimke helped us to remember that even this morning. So I'll close by reading from that very Word. 1 Peter 1 beginning in verse 22.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart since you have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and abiding Word of God.

[31 : 37] For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. Grass withers and the flower falls but the Word of the Lord remains forever and this Word is the good news that was preached to you.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we give you thanks this morning that you've given us time to consider the life of Francis Grimke to consider some of his words that he spoke which point us back to your Word which remind us of the great treasure that your Word is and the great privilege that it is for us to hear it preached not just anything said but your Word.

Lord, we pray Father that we would be desiring great sermons in that way because we want more of your Word. We want you to feed us your Word, teach us your Word we pray.

And so even as we're about to sit under the preaching of your Word only minutes from now we pray Father that we would come with eager and expecting hearts that we would be ready for you to teach us by your Spirit to be at work in our hearts.

We pray that you would do us good and we pray that you would be glorified and we pray all of this in Christ's name. Amen. We are dismissed.