

INTRODUCTION

Grimké and the Weightiness of Preaching

No man's ministry is a failure, however meager the results, if he has been faithfully and earnestly preaching the gospel of the grace of God, holding up to dying, sinful men God's message of redeeming love. Such a ministry is not, could not be, a failure.

—Francis J. Grimké

Francis Grimké was a *gospel* man. He had gospel integrity, gospel purpose, and a gospel voice. Grimké began his ministry committed to preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). He faithfully walked in and preached that same gospel all his life. In these pages we invite you to meet Dr. Francis James Grimké and, more importantly, to receive him as your own personal preaching mentor.

Though he has been in glory since 1937, Grimké is an able and worthy preaching mentor. After all, throughout his nearly fifty-year tenure at 15th Street Presbyterian Church, Dr. Grimké was first and foremost a preacher. Grimké was committed to preaching as his highest pastoral priority because he held a deep conviction about the weightiness of the pulpit in the life of the local church. He wrote,

The greatest source of power for good in a church is the pulpit, if it is properly filled—if it is occupied by a God-fearing man, a man who is qualified to teach the people, and who makes it his business, mainly, to feed the flock on the sincere milk of the word instead of on the husks of current happenings in newspapers and magazines. A pulpit well manned is always a source of power—is always an uplifting and ennobling influence. The more ministers themselves realize this, the more earnestly will they endeavor to qualify themselves to meet its great responsibilities and opportunities.¹

Grimké's emphasis on the weightiness of preaching reflects the apostle Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-4:4:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, 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. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves

1 Francis J. Grimké, *The Works of Francis J. Grimké*, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: The Carter G. Woodson Collection, 1942), 3:95.

teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Do We Need Another Book on Preaching?

The impact of Francis Grimké's preaching over the course of fifty years at 15th Street Presbyterian Church cannot be overstated. His impact on his church, Washington, D.C., higher education, and the redress of racism in American society can all be traced back to his preaching. Every godly pastor and aspiring preacher wants their preaching to glorify God and impact the world in ways similar to Francis Grimké. Such preaching requires learning from great preaching mentors. As Proverbs 15:22 says, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed." The book you're holding is a guide to receiving one of the greatest preachers of the twentieth century as your personal preaching mentor. *The Weightiness of Preaching* provides you with a topically organized guide to applying Grimké's various reflections on preaching to your pulpit ministry. We all need mentors and this little book will introduce you to a new, often overlooked, but incredibly important preaching mentor.

In 2018, Log College Press published Grimké's *Meditations On Preaching*. We are incredibly thankful that the team at Log College Press published so many of Grimké's profound quotes on preaching. In our book we build on Log College's work by providing you with:

- A topically organized guide to Grimké's preaching meditations.
- Commentary on Grimké's meditations for enhanced understanding.

- Insights for applying Grimké's preaching meditations taken from our combined decades of preaching experience.

Sadly, we live in an age in which the tradition of having spiritual fathers in the ministry of the gospel is dying. To grow and remain faithful as preachers, we need fathers in the faith and in the ministry. Our prayer is that this book will be a unique gift to you among preaching books by introducing you to a new father and mentor in gospel ministry, the great Francis J. Grimké.

Let's begin the journey toward receiving Francis Grimké as our preaching mentor by first learning about his life and legacy.

Who Was Francis Grimké?

Francis Grimké was born into slavery in 1850 and grew up on a plantation in South Carolina. Grimké's father, Henry, took one of his slaves as a mistress, and Francis was born from their relationship. At his death, Francis Grimké's father freed his son from slavery and placed him under the care of his half-brother, Montague Grimké. After several years of caring for Francis and his brother Archibald, Montague sought to enslave Francis and Archibald. Francis fled north and, through providential circumstances, connected with two of Henry's older sisters (Francis's aunts). These sisters, Sarah and Angelina, left their family's slave-owning plantation before the Civil War in order to join the abolitionist cause in Philadelphia. Sarah and Angelina provided Francis Grimké with familial love, support, and educational funding.

Grimké highly valued education and promoted it all his life. Francis and his brother, Archibald (who played a critical role in founding the National Association for

the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP), were educated in the beautiful halls of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). HBCUs are institutions that were established prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans. Francis graduated as the class valedictorian in 1870 from Pennsylvania's Lincoln University, where he professed faith in Christ. After deciding not to study medicine he chose to pursue the study of law at another HBCU, Howard University in Washington, D.C. However, God had another plan for Francis's life and career. Andrew Menkis in his article "The Black Puritan: Meet Francis Grimké" writes, "Francis began to feel God call him to pastoral ministry, so he decided to go to Princeton Theological Seminary, where he studied from 1875–1878."²

In 1878, Francis married Charlotte Forten. She was the granddaughter of James Forten, a leader of the free African American community in Philadelphia, and close friends with many leading abolitionists. Francis and Charlotte had a baby girl in 1880 and then grieved her loss later that year. Grimké was a faithful husband until Charlotte died in 1914 after thirty-six years of marriage. Francis J. Grimké was ordained a Presbyterian minister on July 7, 1878. His first pastorate was at 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., where he served for nearly fifty years.

Francis Grimké lived with integrity as a husband, pastor, brother, leader, and father despite the loss of his child and his wife. Grimké pastored through many tumultuous periods in American history. He pastored through the devastating crumbling of racial justice following the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision and the advance of Jim

2 <https://corechristianity.com/resources/articles/the-black-puritan-meet-francis-grimke>.

Crow laws in the South. He pastored through the Spanish-American War, World War I, the Spanish Flu, the 1929 stock market crash, the Great Depression, and twenty American presidencies. Through it all, he was faithful and fruitful by God's grace.

Importance, Influence, and Impact

Commending Francis Grimké, in 1912 William Ferris, the eccentric Negro militant, wrote:

Twenty years ago, when I was a sophomore at Yale, men spoke the name, "Dr. Grimké," with respect and reverence. And they do today. . . . Since the deaths of Bishop Payne and Dr. Crummell, Dr. Grimké has remained the most potent figure in the Negro ecclesiastical world . . . Yet fifty years later his name was known but to a handful of scholars, black or white.³

Francis Grimké's words and example are just as important today as they were when he was alive. He lived through extreme social upheaval and despair, faithfully serving Jesus through it all. Through steady, faithful preaching, Francis Grimké influenced his culture, country, community, and Christianity. Grimké emphasized black excellence. He was not anti-white; he was pro-gospel. His influence set a culture of excellence and godliness. Grimké engaged thoughtfully with the American politics of his time. He was a former slave and a faithful citizen; like Calvin, he sought to fix the structures and not escape society. He wrote letters to challenge presidents, responded to injustice, and consistently pointed everyone to Jesus Christ. Grimké influenced his local community

3 <https://biblioskoex.wordpress.com/2023/04/02/the-dean-of-negro-preachers-william-henry-ferris-on-francis-grimke/#more-3218>.

by engaging in city ministry, education, pastoring, and disciple-making. He preached, disciplined, baptized, married, conducted funerals, administered the sacraments, and visited congregants as a faithful pastor. His sermons remain gifts to the church today, continuing to influence new generations of pastors. Grimké's importance as an African American church father cannot be overstated. His faithfulness and integrity through troubled times make his voice vital for the entire American church today.

Learning from Grimké is also crucial because he is an authentic part of American history. He lived through pivotal events in our country. He was a product of America. His life is African American history, but beyond that, it's American *Christian* history. We should note his significant work with other beloved American theologians such as Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, Geerhardus Vos, and J. Gresham Machen.

More personally, reading Grimké has helped us pastor our churches through our current challenging cultural climate. As a young Presbyterian, I (Doug) sought to identify with an African American in Presbyterianism. I'm so thankful I met Francis J. Grimké. His work and life inspire and shape my ministry. One day when he was a little boy, my son Aharon Logan came into my office and said, "You got a lot of books, Dad—you got any black people in these books too?" I realized that there were not a lot of books by or about black reformers. This reality is a loss to the church and something I pray we will remedy. Learning from Francis J. Grimké's expansive wisdom on preaching is an excellent place to start. Grimké Seminary and now this book are ways in which we desire to honor and highlight the legacy of this great Christian stalwart.

For all these reasons and more, we are eager to introduce you to Francis Grimké's brilliant reflections on preaching and be your guides as you welcome Grimké as your new preaching mentor.