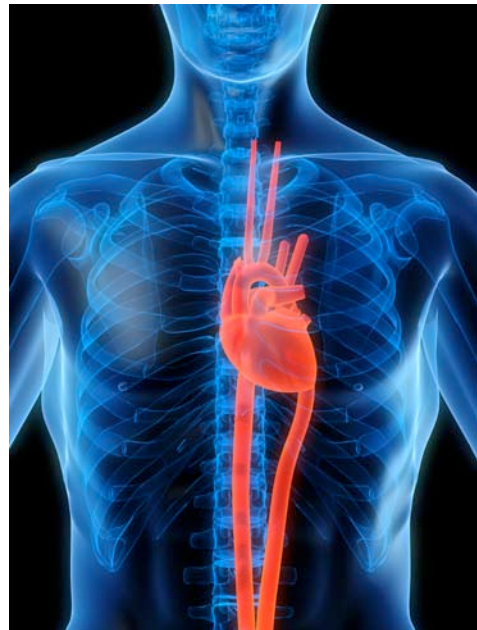

How Sermons Work

An Introduction to Sermon Preparation

David P Murray



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How do they do that?

One of my favorite childhood books was “How do they do that?” The Discovery Channel took the same idea and made it into a TV program called “How do they do it?” The Internet has its own howstuffworks.com. These and other similar books, programs, and websites tap into our natural human curiosity. We want to know what lies behind the surface, what led up to the discovery, what makes what.

This e-book is a “How do they do that?” about preaching. If it was a website, we would call it howsermonswork.com. I’ve written for four audiences. First, it’s for seminary students who want a short practical guide on how to prepare and preach a sermon. They will read the classic books on preaching theory and practice as they continue their studies, but their “practice preaching” class is looming and they desperately need a helping hand to get started. Here it is.

Second, the book is for elders. The material was originally prepared to help the elders in my last congregation. There were a number of churches without pastors in the area, resulting in many preaching requests coming to these men. I wanted to give them a simple step-by-step guide to help them prepare sermons in an efficient, enjoyable, and edifying way. I’ve expanded the material since then, but I hope this short book will help other elders in similar positions become more “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).

Third, I hope that even experienced preachers might pick up a crumb or two by reading this brief “refresher.”

But, perhaps above all, I want non-preachers to read the book. Given that the most important hours in a Christian’s week are the 1-2 hours they spend listening to their pastor’s sermons, I find it surprising how few Christians are interested in “how do they do that?”

Some people seem to think that pastors “receive” their messages direct from God. They imagine some mysterious process by which the pastor just “gets” a sermon. That is too high a view of preaching. It makes preaching more for angels than for ordinary mortals. I want to show that, just like any other work, there is a reasonable and logical method and system to follow.

Others think that a pastor just spends the week relaxing, gets up on a Sunday, and says the first thing that comes into his mind with little or no forethought or planning. That is too low a view of preaching. Anyone with a bit of verbal fluency could do it. I want to demonstrate that behind the 30-45 minutes you see and hear on a Sunday morning are many hours of mental, spiritual, and practical labor. Like all pastoral labor, it involves head, heart and hand.

If you want to increase respect for your pastor and his preaching, ask “How do they do that?” Then read this ebook and find out the answer.



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How Sermons Work

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Preparation

Preparing to preach

Introduction

God prepares a man to preach the Gospel by giving him certain convictions: convictions about his relationship to God, his relationship to his Bible, and his relationship to his people.

The Preacher and His God

A preacher must have clear convictions about his relation to God.

1. A sinner saved by the grace of God

The pendulum of your heart must be continually swinging between two states. You must know that you are a hell-deserving sinner with a deceitful and desperately wicked heart. And you must know that you are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ through faith in His blood. The further and faster the pendulum swings between these two convictions, the happier and healthier will be your preaching. No one has a right to preach who is not totally and utterly convinced of his own sinful misery and of Christ's saving mercy.

2. A preacher sent by the grace of God

Paul not only speaks of being saved by the grace of God, but also of being "sent" by the grace of God.

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 (Eph. 3:8).

Paul's divine "sending" also implies a divine "calling." Now this is not the place to go into much detail about the "call to the ministry." Suffice to say that the preacher should have two calls – the one internal and the other external. The exact nature of these calls varies from person to person. But, in general, we can say that the internal call is a burden or longing to preach based on right motives: the desire to obey God, to edify God's people, and to save souls. The external call is the church's confirmation of the internal call and involves the church's examination of the preacher's motives, gifts, and Christian experience.

The main point here is to maintain a constant sense of the divine call – when preparing to preach, when preaching, and when reflecting on the results of your preaching. This will set another pendulum swinging in your heart. It will swing from humility (resulting from the knowledge that it is divine mercy not human merit that has made you a preacher), to authority (resulting from the knowledge that God has commissioned you).

3. A sinner supplied with the gifts of God

Not only is the preacher saved by God's grace, and sent by God's grace, but he is also gifted by God's grace. A man can be gifted without being called and sent, but a man cannot be called and sent without being gifted. God supplies both the calling and the gifts to fulfill that calling.

What kind of gifts will be present in the preacher?

- A strong self-discipline

The preacher has no "boss," no supervisor, or manager. This means that he is able to do as little or as much as he desires in whatever areas he chooses. This is why so many lazy and undisciplined men have been attracted to the ministry. And this is why, when a man is truly called of God to the ministry, he is divinely equipped with an ability to organize and discipline himself to do his duty, even when there is no one to check up on him.

- A love of studying

As the core of the preacher's task is the study of God's Word, God will usually bless the preacher with a love of studying.

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine...Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 2:15).

- An ability to communicate

God will usually bless the preacher with a clear mind and a clear voice, resulting in a clear message from God to men. God does not send messengers who confuse and bamboozle His people with displays of their learning, or their lack of it.

The preacher must not only have a grasp upon the truth, but the ability to convey the truth, with conviction and with convincing authority.
- Al Martin.



- A love of people

There are many preachers who love their studies but wish they never had to come out of them. They love preparing sermons, lectures, and addresses but seem to wish they did not need a congregation to deliver them to. The God-sent messenger loves the people God has given to him. He enjoys visiting the flock and feeding the flock.

The gifts summarized above, and others, must be cultivated, stirred up, and developed (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).



I fear none of us apprehend as we ought to do the value of the preacher's office. Our young men do not gird themselves for it with the spirit of those who are on the eve of a great conflict; nor do they prepare as those who are to lay their hands upon the springs of the mightiest passions, and stir up to their depths the ocean of human feelings.
- James W. Alexander.

4. A sinner summoned to the bar of God

“Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2) was Paul’s last charge to Timothy and it was given in the context of the final judgment (verse 1). Paul’s whole ministry was conducted in the awesome shadow of the last day.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men (Acts 24:15-16).



Next to the presence of Christ, there is no greater companion to the minister than that of a good conscience. To have the Lord at your side and a peaceful conscience in your breast – these are the preacher’s two greatest companions.
-Al Martin

A constant awareness of the final judgment will help you to shun ignorance, levity, indiscretion, dishonesty, laziness, vanity, and self-seeking. It will make you zealous, energetic, disciplined, prayerful, sober, and faithful.

Summary

- Clear convictions about who has saved you, sent you, and supplied you with gifts will breed a deep-seated and essential humility before God.
- The conviction that you are a divinely commissioned messenger will make you study with diligence and speak with clarity, authority, and sobriety, knowing that one day you will be called to give an account to the One who sent you.

My dear young friend, if there is anything you would rather be than a preacher of the gospel, if you regard it as a ladder to something else; if you do not consider all your powers as too little for the work; be assured you have no right to hope for any usefulness or even eminence.
James W. Alexander.



The Preacher and His Bible

God, in his mercy, has spoken and continues to speak to humanity through his works of creation and providence. While this “general” revelation makes known God’s goodness, wisdom, and power, it is not enough to show a sinner the way of salvation. Consequently, in a further display of his mercy, God made a “special” revelation of this necessary extra knowledge, to carefully chosen spokesmen, through theophanies, audible voices, dreams, visions, etc. As a preacher you must have certain clear convictions about this special revelation.

I. The Inspiration of Scripture

You must believe that God, by a mighty work of the Holy Spirit, has infallibly secured an accurate and permanent written record of these special revelations in the Old and New Testaments. This work of the Holy Spirit, often called inspiration, secures an infallibility which extends to every word of Scripture, including those parts which make historical or scientific claims.

2. The Authority of Scripture

In a day when Scripture is being questioned and undermined as never before and when everyone regards his own opinion as authoritative, it is essential that the preacher be absolutely convinced of the ultimate authority of Scripture. The preacher must understand and communicate that the words he preaches are not his own but God's, and as such they are not optional but binding on all. Michael Barrett sums it up: "The Bible is the absolute standard of truth (matters of faith) and the absolute rule for living (matters of practice)."

3. The Sufficiency of Scripture

The preacher must be convinced that the Bible is God's all- and only-sufficient method of saving sinners and sanctifying saints (Heb. 4:12-13; Rom. 10:14ff).

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. (Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8)

4. The Interpretation of Scripture

Although there are difficult passages of Scripture, the preacher must be convinced that it can be interpreted by using the ordinary means God has provided.

Those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (Westminster Confession of Faith 1.7)

Summary

Clear and constant convictions regarding Scripture will motivate reading, study and enjoyment of it. As a preacher, you must have a systematic plan of regularly reading through the whole Bible, with a portion from both the Old and New Testaments being read each day. Dedication and application are needed if you are to find the truths essential to our faith and practice, as well as to your calling.

We fail in our duty to study God's Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or a lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.
- R. C. Sproul



The Preacher and His People

The preacher must have convictions about His relationship to the people he is to preach to.

1. You are similar

The preacher must never imagine that he is better than his hearers. He may well be “less than the least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8). So, he is what he is by the grace of God – saved, sent and supplied by grace. The awareness that “I am not better than them” will produce humility, sympathy, watchfulness, and a willingness to accept constructive criticism.

2. You are different

Though not by nature better than his hearers, the preacher must be different from his hearers. This is not an argument for aloofness and detachment. However, to whoever much is given, much shall be required; and much has been given to the preacher. He must be an example to his hearers and set higher standards than the norm.

Aristotle said that the secular orator must establish with his hearers a character for discretion, (knowledge or judgment); second, for probity; and third, for benevolence, or good-will toward them. If this is true in the secular how much more in the sacred realm.



Without a sacred weight of character, the most splendid rhetoric will win only a short-lived applause; with it, the plainest scriptural instructions are eloquent to win souls. Eloquence may dazzle and please; holiness of life convinces... The pastor's character speaks more loudly than his tongue.
- Robert L. Dabney

Summary

By holding the seeming paradox of similar yet different, you will set forth “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12), while maintaining a humble, approachable and sympathetic spirit.

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Selection

Selecting a text

Introduction

“What will I preach on?” This is the question which challenges, vexes, and even haunts many preachers every day of their lives. Some preachers answer the question by preaching on social issues, or on politics, or on psychology. For the gospel-centered preacher this is not an option. For him the more limited question is, “What portion of Scripture will I preach on?”

This more limited question directs us in the general direction of the Scriptures, and in the specific direction of a “text” of Scripture, upon which the sermon will be based. The necessity of addressing this question is derived from the nature of the preacher’s task, which is to preach the whole counsel of God. Being unable to do this all at once in one sermon, he must divide his sermons into separate addresses on separate portions of God’s Word. Hence the question, “What portion of Scripture or ‘text’ will I preach on?”

What is a text?

1. Definition of ‘Text’

The word ‘text’ is from the Latin *textum* which means woven. This suggests that your sermon ‘text’ is woven into the whole fabric of the Scriptures, and therefore must not be torn out of its connections and relations with the rest of Scripture. It also indicates that your ‘text’ must be woven into the whole fabric of the sermon.

Your ‘text’ must be taken from Scripture, be shown in its relation to the rest of Scripture, and be the substance of your sermon.

2. Defining a ‘Text’

How much Scripture constitutes a ‘text.’ Can a text be one word or one phrase? Must it be one whole verse? May it extend to many verses? The best way to answer this is to consider the three main kinds of ‘texts.’

- Classic texts

These texts are phrases, sentences, or a verse which contain the cardinal truths of redemption: original sin, new birth, justification, the deity of Christ, etc.

Example: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:20). A sermon on such a text will explain what sin is, what death is, and how they are connected. It will show the connection with Ezekiel’s previous line of argument, and also its relation to the doctrines of sin and death in other parts of Scripture.

Single sentences setting forth transcendent truths like these, may well receive the exclusive treatment of a whole sermon...A sermon on such a text...is in the best sense expository, for it explains whole tracts of the Scripture.

- Robert L. Dabney



• Conclusion texts

These may consist of simply one phrase or one sentence, which gives the moral of a whole parable, or the summary of the whole passage. However, the preacher must expound the connected passage which leads up to the 'conclusion.'

Example: "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Lk. 16:9). This is a summary of the parable in verses 1-8, and any sermon should explain both the parable and the summary.

Regarding both 'classic' and 'conclusion' texts it should be made clear that such texts should not be used as a mere motto to introduce the sermon. Nor should the preacher normally select his subject, then seek a text for it.

The sermon should not dictate the choice of a text, but the text should determine the whole character of the sermon.

Robert L. Dabney



• Consecutive texts

This refers to the systematic explanation of a number of verses, one after the other. It may be a short passage or it may be long. Its length will be determined by a number of factors – the genre of the literature (historical narrative, doctrine, poetry, etc.), the density of the material (doctrinal, devotional, etc.), the variety of subjects (where a new subject is introduced or a new argument is begun), the length of time available for the sermon, etc. While preachers may choose a portion of Scripture for consecutive exposition from different books each week, it is also a common practice to work systematically through one chapter or one book over a number of weeks.

Example: Genesis 6:1-10 would be a suitable portion for consecutive exposition. Its beginning and ending are clearly marked. It begins with a horrendous description of the state of the earth in the days of Noah, and God's displeasure. It ends with the description of Noah walking with God, and God's delight in him.

Your 'text' should be a portion of Scripture which is explained in relation to its context. Care should be taken to define the limits of the 'text,' explain the 'text,' and show its relations to its context and the rest of Scripture. All preaching should be expository in substance, whether classic, conclusion, or consecutive in style.

Why choose a text?

- Let us now consider six advantages of choosing a 'text' of Scripture, as defined above, as the basis for exposition in a sermon.
- This is the Scriptural practice in both the Old Testament (Neh. 6:6-8) and the New Testament (Lk. 4:16-19; Acts 2:14-36).
- It gives the Scriptures their rightful honored place. It explicitly affirms that the Scriptures are the only rule to direct us how to glorify and enjoy God. It declares the Scriptures to be our only rule of faith and practice.
- It gives a sacredness of tone to the sermon and imparts divine authority to the preacher's words.
- It keeps the preacher from wandering away from the Scriptures, so ensuring that they are explained in public and, therefore, that God is revealed to the public.
- Text-based sermons are more likely to have structure and unity, and therefore are more easily remembered by both the preacher and the hearers.
- The wide variety of 'texts' in the Scriptures is more likely to produce variety in exposition and therefore excite continued interest.

The whole authority of his addresses to the conscience depends upon the correspondence between his explanations and inferences and the infallible word.

- Robert L. Dabney



Summary: If you want sermons which conform to the Scriptural example, that honor the Scriptures, that are authoritative, that reveal God, that are 'memorable,' and that excite interest, then preach expository sermons, sermons which explain texts of Scripture.

How to choose a text

Having established what is a 'text' and highlighted the advantages of preaching from a 'text' we shall now propose helps to choosing a 'text.' This is perhaps the most important task in any preacher's life. We shall consider the source and substance of texts.

The greatest possible labour and care should be expended upon the choice of a text...As in secular oratory, the selection of a subject is either vital or fatal to the whole performance. So in sacred oratory, the success of the preacher depends entirely upon the fitness of his choice of a text...

Labour at this point saves labour at all after points

- W. G. T. Shedd

I hope we all make it a matter of very earnest and serious consideration, every week, what shall be the subjects upon which we shall address our people on the Sabbath morning and evening; for, although all Scripture is good and profitable, yet it is not all equally appropriate for every occasion

- Charles H. Spurgeon



3. The source of texts

- Read the Bible

The preacher should be reading his Bible to edify his own soul. In the ordinary course of this reading he will come across suitable sermon texts which grip him, move him, and interest him.

- Read good books

As time for reading is limited, make sure you are reading the books which will produce the most sermons. By that I do not mean books of sermons. I mean books which will refer to Scripture, explain Scripture, and highlight Scripture in a way which may form the basis of a sermon.

- Listen to your people

In the course of pastoral visitation subjects will arise which will stimulate the mind and suggest texts for sermons.

- Read the news

I do not intend to suggest here that newspaper headlines become our texts. However, the news will highlight trends in thought, in religion, in lifestyle and in morals which the pastor's mind will need to be alert to in order to address in the pulpit.

- Observe Providence

Momentous events like war, earthquakes, disease, tragedies impact upon our people and will often provide a topical introduction to a sermon on God's providence and our response to it.

- Listen to God

It may seem strange to put this after these other sources, as the sources just mentioned are all ways in which we listen to God. However, what we are referring to here specifically is the necessity of the preacher to remain sensitive to the voice of God in his own soul. God, who searches all spirits will at times directly impress a text upon the spirit of the preacher. The preacher may not know the reason for this, but should respond to it, trusting that God has seen a need, invisible perhaps to everyone else, and knows the text to address it.

The right text is the one which comes of itself during reading and meditation: which accompanies you in walks, goes to bed with you, and rises with you. On such texts, thoughts swarm, like bees upon a branch.

- James W. Alexander



- Pray

Charles Spurgeon takes us further than simply listening to God. He urges that we cry to God for the text.

When your text comes in answer to prayer, it will be all the dearer to you, it will come with a divine savour and unction altogether unknown to the formal orator.

- Charles H. Spurgeon



Summary: If you read your Bible, keep your mind refreshed with good books, visit people, stay abreast of current affairs, observe providence, and remain prayerfully sensitive to God's voice, your problem will not be a lack of 'texts' but an embarrassment of riches. In order to preserve these riches in store for future use, you should keep handy a notebook in which to write 'texts' sourced in these ways, together with 'skeletons' of sermons or thoughts already formed.

4. The substance of texts

- Complete

As we have already noted, the length of a 'text' can be long or short, many verses or few verses. But, however long or short, the 'text' should be complete. It should not be a mere fragment of Scripture nor a piece of Scripture used as a 'motto.' The markers for where a 'text' begins and ends have already been discussed.

- Important

The 'text' must contain an important point. While every verse in Scripture is important, not all contain important truths. Many connect those which do. The Holy Spirit did not intend a sermon in every sentence of Scripture. We must therefore major on the majors.

- Brief

The 'text' should be as brief as completeness and importance will allow. Short 'texts' are more easily remembered and allow emphatic repetition. Remember, you may give a summary of the whole, then intimate that you are limiting yourselves for that particular sermon to a particular part of the 'text,' preferably a particularly striking part.

- Clear

The plainer the 'text' the better. If you have a choice of two 'texts' to teach the same truth then let the simple one be the preferred one and use it to cast light on the less clear. Obscure 'texts' require much explanation before they can profitably become a message from God.

The text is the key-note to the whole sermon. The more bold, the more undoubted and undisputed its tone, the better....It challenges attention and gets it. It startles and impresses by its direct and authoritative announcement of a great and solemn proposition. Nothing remains, then, but for the preacher to go out upon it with his whole weight, to unfold and apply its evident undoubted meaning, with all the moral confidence and all the serious earnestness of which he is capable.

- W. G. T. Shedd



- Natural

A sermon should not be forced into a 'text' but should be derived from it in a plain, natural, and obvious manner. Avoid oddity and eccentricity. The apostle argues for the "things that are good and profitable to men" and against "the things that are unprofitable and vain" (Tit. 3:8,9). He warns against curiosity or speculation (2 Tim. 2:15, 16, 23). What you need is not novelty but freshness.

- Varied

Make sure you are preaching a balanced diet of Scripture to your people by constantly reviewing your preaching calendar. If there has been too much emphasis on the Old Testament, or on the love of God, or on biography, or on doctrine, or on history, etc., then remedial action should be taken. You must preach the whole counsel of God. Only balanced preaching will leave the impression God intended with the mould of Scripture. Imbalanced preaching will distort the mould and, consequently, the impress on the hearers.

- Suitable

The selection of 'texts' will be influenced by the time of year (Harvest, Communion, War, etc.). Selection should also be influenced by the spiritual needs of the congregation: what sins are they falling into, what joys do they celebrate, what trials are they facing, etc.

We dare not rush into the King's banquet hall with a confusion of provisions as though the entertainment were to be a vulgar scramble, but as well-mannered servitors we pause and ask the great Master of the feast, Lord what wouldst thou have us set upon thy table this day.
- Charles H. Spurgeon



Summary: When you select your 'text' ask yourself: "Is it complete, is it important, is it brief, is it clear, is it natural, is it varied, is it suitable?"

Conclusion



The preacher's mind should be occupied with...true rather than false...positive rather than negative...great rather than small...divine rather than human.
- James W. Alexander

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Interrogation

Exegeting the text

Introduction

Once you have selected your text, the next step is to interrogate it – ask it questions from different angles to help you reach its full meaning. This chapter will propose a series of questions to ask of your text

1. Is your text in the Old Testament or the New Testament?

This is an important question to ask because the meaning of words and concepts may vary depending on whether the text is under the “Old Covenant” or under the “New Covenant” dispensation.

Example: The ceremonial laws requiring various sacrifices under the “Old Covenant” have been abolished by the final and full sacrifice of Jesus Christ under the “New Covenant.” So, any sermon on these laws would have to emphasize their practical abolition, but also their continued theological significance.

2. What book does your text appear in?

If the previous question will help you place your text in its covenantal context, this question will help you set it in its canonical context. By identifying the book’s place in God’s progressive revelation of himself, you will more safely arrive at its original meaning and avoid importing later revelations of God into your interpretation.

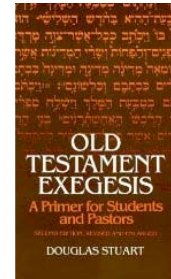
Example: While God’s use of the plural “let us make” in Genesis 1 allows for the later doctrine of the trinity, it is not certain that the original readers interpreted this as a plurality of persons in the Godhead. It is only later, when God had established monotheism in His people, that it was safe to reveal that that one God was three persons.

3. What is the historical background?

By identifying when the events of the text took place, you will be able to refer to other passages of Scripture which bear upon that time. You will also be able to discover if there are any significant links with events which came before or after. It is important to work on educating your congregation in biblical chronology.

Example: Further light can be shed on Ezra and Nehemiah when you discover that the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were ministering during the same period.

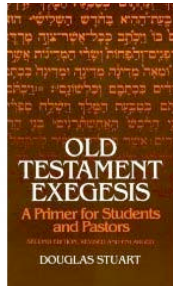
Most churchgoers know few dates. They usually aren't sure whether Esther comes before or after Abraham, or in what century to locate any of them. The more often you take the time to explain the dates related to a passage (it need not take very long, after all), the more clear the interrelationships of people, books, and events will become to your congregation. God's revelation to us is a historical one – do not neglect chronology.
- Douglas Stuart



4. What is the geographical setting?

A spatial awareness of where each biblical nation and region are located will help you understand the various threats and alliances which Israel passed through. An ability to describe the terrain and physical features of an area will help listeners to paint the picture of the setting in their own minds. You will want to have a good set of Biblical maps to refer to.

Example: Describing the geographical cul-de-sac – mountains, desert, sea – which Israel ended up in at the Red Sea underlines the humanly impossible situation they were in.



Many preachers report that the results of this part of the process especially produce the sorts of remarks in a sermon that cause members of a congregation to say that they felt like they were 'right there,' i.e., able to imagine themselves in something of the same relationship to the biblical material that the original audience presumably was.
- Douglas Stuart

5. What kind of literature is it?

The nature of the literature will affect the nature of your interpretation. Different literary categories are prose, song, wisdom, apocalyptic, biography, narrative, prophecy, legal code, etc.

Example: If you are preaching from Daniel, you will interpret the historical narrative sections in a way quite different from the apocalyptic, or visionary parts.

6. Are there any cultural references?

By identifying practices unique to Israelite culture, you will avoid making wrong applications of culturally specific practices to other cultures. Use a Bible dictionary or Encyclopedia here.

Example: The necessity of building a fence around the roof of one's home was only relevant to a flat-roofed culture in which the roof was often used for practical and social reasons. However, note that there is a transferable principle of taking responsibility for other's safety while on our property which is not culturally bound.

7. What doctrines are involved?

The highlighting of certain explicit or implicit doctrines will alert you to the need for studying these particular doctrines to discover their importance and consequences in your text.

Example: “And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD and it was counted to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). This verse would require you to consider the doctrine of justification by faith and imputed righteousness.

8. Are there any cross-references?

From your knowledge of Scripture you should know if it is quoted, alluded to, interpreted or developed in other parts of Scripture. You will also want to use a thorough cross-reference resource like the Thompson Chain Reference Bible.

Example: If you take Genesis 16:6 again, you will find that it is referred to in Romans 4, Galatians 3, and James 2.

9. How is your text connected with the surrounding verses, chapters, or even books?

There are certain connecting words to look out for: “and...therefore...however...but... nevertheless... then, etc.” This should highlight the need to connect your text with what goes before or after.

Example: Notice the connections between the various books of the Pentateuch. Also, notice that the Ten Commandments are preceded with a statement of redemption (Ex.20:2), and concluded with a reference to sacrifice. Making these connections will prevent you preaching legalistic sermons on the commandments.

10. Is there selectivity?

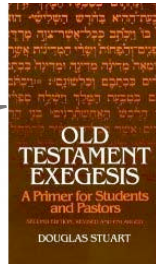
Some books repeat what is told in other books. However, they usually present the same events in a different way. The writer is inspired to select the facts which will best serve his overall purpose. By understanding this selectivity you will gain clues to the overall purpose of the writer.

Example: The books of Kings and Chronicles cover many of the same events. However, Kings was written before the Babylonian captivity and highlights the sins of the kings which caused the captivity. Chronicles was written after the nation had been taken captive to Babylon and presents the line of David in a more positive light in order to re-ignite hope of a restoration of the Davidic kingdom and the Messianic hope.

11. Who is the author?

Sometimes this is not explicitly stated. However, even if the name cannot be stated with 100% certainty, the character of the author will often shine through.

To a listener, a passage of Scripture often seems more 'real' if its author has been identified and the general character of his writing has been described just a bit.
- Douglas Stuart



Example: When preaching from the Psalms written by David, it is helpful to try and relate the sentiments in the Psalm to David's character and life.

12. When was it written?

This may be different from the answer to the question regarding when did the events narrated take place. The text or the book may yield clues to when it was written. Knowledge of who wrote, when he wrote, and to whom he wrote may have an impact on what events in the history were highlighted and why.

Example: Genesis was written by Moses, which means that it was written many years after the events narrated in the book. It appears that Moses was using Israel's ancient history to guide the nation regarding its present duty to leave Egypt behind and press on into the Promised Land.

13. What are the main words in the text?

You should make a list of all the important verbs, nouns and adjectives. This will help in performing word studies and also in structuring your sermon. Notice especially if any words are used repeatedly.

Example: "In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, GOING and WEEPING: they shall GO, and SEEK the Lord" (Jer. 50:4). The key verbs here may also provide your sermon headings.

14. What are the most important places or personalities?

Again this can prove a suitable source of further research and also of sermon headings.

Example: : A sermon on Genesis 16 might look at events from four different perspectives based on the main personalities: Abram, Sarai, Hagar, and Ishmael.

15. How do other versions translate the text?

Obviously it is best if you can study the Scriptures in the original languages. However if you can't, and even if you can, you will often get light on your text by comparing how other versions translate it.

Example: Notice the extra light which the NKJV throws on the underlined phrase below.

"For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness; thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head" (Ps.21:3 KJV)

"For You meet him with the blessings of goodness; You set a crown of pure gold upon his head" (Ps.21:3 NKJV)

16. How is the text structured?

This is especially relevant if you are considering more than one verse. If it is a narrative, is there a beginning, middle, and end? If it is a Psalm, does the Psalmist move from despair to hope, or from praise to practice? If it is a proverb, is there evidence of parallel statements – the same truth expressed twice, though in different ways.

Example: Look at the structure of Psalm 57. There is a cry to God for help (v. 1-5), a report of deliverance (v. 6), then praise to God for his help (v. 7-11).

17. What are the applications in the areas of faith and action?

Who is the text speaking to – Christians or unbelievers, young or old, male or female, rich or poor, successful or failing, Jew or Gentile? Is there a doctrine to be believed or a duty to be performed? Is there an obvious command or exhortation? Is there a rebuke or a consolation to be administered?

Example: Psalm 57 is a suitable model of faith and practice for those in trouble.

18. Is there anything controversial in the text?

There may be something in the text which Christians have disagreed upon. You should attempt to understand each view's strengths and weaknesses and defend the view you support.

Example: The prophecies of Ezekiel 40-48 regarding a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem have been taken literally by some Christians and symbolically by others.

19. What do commentators say?

You should build up a resource of reliable commentators on the text. As our financial resources are limited, you will be best to start with reliable practical commentaries on the whole Bible (e.g. Matthew Henry; Matthew Poole; Jamieson, Faucett and Brown, etc.). It is good to read the mature conclusions of others in order to check our own conclusions.

Example: You may want to consult a commentary if you are uncertain as to how to apply the text to your hearers. Matthew Henry and Arthur Pink are masters of this art.

20. What is central and what is peripheral?

Learn to distinguish between what is of primary and what is of secondary importance in a text. You cannot say everything possible about every text in every sermon. Neither would you want to. Major on the majors and minor on the minors.

Example: When preaching on the Red Sea crossing don't get diverted by all the speculation about what and where the Red Sea actually was. The most important point is the divine miracle of the crossing.

Conclusion

Learn to interrogate your text with patience, submission and a listening ear. Collate your answers and meditate upon them. Pray for light on unanswered questions.

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Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 75, 74

Variation

Varying your sermons

Introduction

If all your sermons were gathered together into one pie, and then organized into category slices, how many slices would there be, and how big or small would each slice be?

In this chapter I will highlight and describe various sermon-category slices to help you discover if you are preaching the whole “cake” of Scripture. A consciousness of the various kinds of sermon that may be preached challenges the preacher to vary his style and content, preventing monotonous sameness. It may also highlight gaps that may be filled by concentrated study in that particular area.

Although the question of slice size will be touched upon below, the variables of preacher, hearer, time, place, and needs are too great to give any concrete rules. Answers to this question should be constantly and prayerfully sought from the great Shepherd of the sheep.

One point I might make before considering slice-size is the need for a balanced selection of texts from Old Testament and New Testament; and in the New Testament, from both the Gospels and the Epistles. If we divide Scripture into three main divisions – the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the Epistles – a general rule of thumb might be that our texts should be drawn in roughly equal proportion from these three sources.

One last word of qualification before I present a classification of the different types of sermon. Please remember that the distinctions are not always clear-cut and will often overlap. However, the distinctions are still useful if we remember that we are talking about general emphasis more than distinct and separate classes.

The Slices

I. The Doctrinal Sermon

A doctrinal sermon presents the facts and truths of the Gospel message. It involves systematic and methodical instruction in the great doctrines of Christianity. Truth is the staple diet of the Christian and is the lifeblood of faith and holiness. This practical end should be kept in view. Doctrinal instruction is always with a view to believing and doing. As the Reformers said, “Doctrines must be preached practically, and duties doctrinally.”

Sermons should have real teaching in them, and their doctrine should be solid, substantial, and abundant...Nothing can compensate for the absence of teaching; all the rhetoric in the world is but as chaff to the wheat in contrast to the gospel of our salvation.
- Charles H. Spurgeon



One tendency to avoid is to try and preach a whole doctrine (e.g. justification) in one sermon. This results in general, vague, and uninteresting sermons.

To choose some one aspect of a great subject is usually far better, as there is thus much better opportunity for the speaker to work out something fresh, and much better prospect of making the hearers take a lively interest in the subject as a whole... Take it as a general rule, the more narrow the subject, the more thoughts you will have.

- John Broadus

Example 1: Instead of preaching on the atonement in general you may divide the subject into various sermons entitled: (1) The need for atonement, (2) the nature of the atonement, (3) the extent of the atonement, (4) the beneficiaries of the atonement, (5) the effects of the atonement.

The preacher who can endeavor to make doctrinal truth interesting as well as intelligible to his congregation, and gradually bring them to a good acquaintance with the doctrines of the Bible, is rendering them an inestimable service.

- John Broadus

2. Theistic Sermons

This may seem a strange idea, as surely all sermons are theistic? There are two points to be underlined here. First, ensure that your sermons are focussed on God – His nature, His demands, His provisions – rather than being focussed on the needs and desires of men and women. Second, there must be a balance in our theism. We must ensure that we preach the whole God, as well as the whole counsel of God. We must not neglect the Father, the Son, or the Spirit. Instead let our preaching on each of the persons of the Godhead reflect the Scriptural balance.

Example: In some circles the Holy Spirit may be over-emphasized, but in others He may be under-represented.

3. Apologetic Sermons

Apologetic preaching involves the defense of Scriptural doctrine and exposure of false views, with the ultimate aim of protecting the flock. This usually involves defense of the doctrines of Scripture, and may also involve exposing and attacking opposite views.

In preaching such sermons, we must be aware of certain dangers. First, we must avoid the implication that the truthfulness of Christianity is open to question. Second, care must be taken not to suggest difficulties previously unknown and then failing to adequately address and remove them. Third, remember that the argument for Christianity is cumulative and cannot be presented in its entirety in one sermon.

Example: The use of evidences to support six-day creation and the exposure and refutation of evolution.

4. Controversial Sermons

While apologetic sermons are concerned with the defense of Christianity from attacks coming from outside the church, we use the term “controversial” or “polemical” for sermons which are concerned with errors and heresies from within the church.

Preachers must be willing to contend for the faith (Jude 3) and hold fast to the form of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13). There are two extremes to be avoided here. First, the false charity which never contends with any other Christians even when duty calls. Second, there is the love of conflict and the associated failure to distinguish between fundamental and secondary issue. James W. Alexander warned against “preaching with a contentious spirit, or so as to produce such a spirit.”

It would seem to be a just principle that a preacher should never go out of his way to find a controversial matter, nor go out of his way to avoid it. He who continually shrinks from conflict should stir himself up to faithfulness; he who is by nature belligerent, should cultivate forbearance and courtesy.
- John Broadus



Example: Sermons which expose the modern errors surrounding the doctrine of justification.

5. Practical Sermons

Practical or ethical sermons discuss and propose the duties of the Christian toward God and man. It should be remembered that the aim and end of all sermons is practical. However, here we are considering sermons which have an especially practical emphasis.

Practical sermons should be both negative and positive, condemning the wrong and exhorting to the right. They should be specific and not general, abstract or vague. Liberty of conscience should be recognized, and motivation should be love-centered not law-centered.

The exclusive preaching of doctrine to professed Christians tends to cultivate an Antinomian spirit. The exclusive inculcation of duties fosters self-righteousness. The edification of the Church, then, demands the diligent intermixture of both kinds.
- Robert L. Dabney



Example: Sermons on many of the Proverbs.

6. Political Sermons

Political sermons present the Christian view on the great questions affecting the State and public morals. Without following a particular party-line, the preacher will bring biblical principles to bear on questions of public policy.

Example: Sermons on the evils of abortion, or on the biblical conditions for a just war.

7. Historical Sermons

Historical sermons present lessons drawn from the many personalities or events which fill the pages of the Bible. We cannot but notice how God has chosen to present most of the doctrines of the Bible in narrative form rather than in simple statements of truth.

Two cautions to bear in mind when preaching historical sermons are, first, the importance of having a sufficient background knowledge of the history, geography and culture of the Bible if we are to present the scenes, events, and people in a vivid and graphic way. Second, remember that all biblical histories, events, and personalities point towards that one person, and one event of Christ's person and work.

Nothing so interests us all as a person. No inanimate object, or general proposition, will make much impression upon mankind at large, unless it is personified or impersonated, or invested with some personal interest....A celebrated lecturer on history once stated in conversation that he found it difficult to interest a popular audience, if he presented merely historical events, periods or lessons. These must be associated with some person.
- John Broadus

Example: The covenant with Abraham pointing towards the ultimate seed and sacrifice of Christ.

8. Experimental Sermons

Experimental (or experiential) sermons describe the varied experiences of men and women receiving the Gospel and living for Christ in the midst of the trials and triumphs of life.

Experimental preaching need not confine itself to the Bible for examples. There are past historical examples, the preacher's own experience, and the experiences of other Christians he knows.

Example: A sermon which describes conviction of sin, how it is wrought, the causes of it, the effects of it.

9. Topical Sermons

Topical sermons need not be tied to one verse but may include consideration of a number of verses on a biblical topic. Or else, some momentous event may provide the basis for a topical sermon.

Example: A tsunami, or a notable accident providing the basis of sermon on the need for repentance and preparation for eternity.

10. Evangelistic Sermons

While all sermons should contain an appeal to the unconverted, evangelistic sermons are aimed largely or wholly at the unconverted. This will involve the application of the law's threatenings against their sin, the presentation of God's provision of a Saviour, the need for repentance and faith, and the urgency of the moment.

Example: A sermon on the Philippian jailer's question, "What must I do to be saved?"

II. Discriminatory Sermons

Discriminatory preaching attempts to distinguish the characteristic marks of the saint and the sinner. It is an anticipation of the final separation of the sheep from the goats based on the evidences of grace or lack it in the lives of the hearers.

Example: A sermon on any one of the beatitudes which set forth the marks of a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

It is much to be regretted that this accurate discrimination in preaching has gone so much out of use in our times. It is but seldom that we hear a discourse from the pulpit which is calculated to afford much aid to Christians in ascertaining their own true character; or which will serve to detect the hypocrite and formalist, and drive them from all their false refuges.

- James W. Alexander



Conclusion

Use this as a checklist to regularly review the diet you are serving up to your hearers. And ask for God's guidance to ensure that you are preaching the whole counsel of God in the proportions required for your situation and people.

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Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to my Students* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1965), 70.

John Broadus, *The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co, 1929), 79, 77, 84, 94.

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Introduction

Beginning the sermon

Introduction

“God is not the author of confusion,” but of order and structure. Therefore any sermon that claims to set forth God should be made in His image; with order and structure. Sermon structure and order will also help the preacher to preach and the hearers to hear, as they are both made in the image of God.

Sermons are like trees; they are made up of roots (the introduction), a trunk with branches (the exposition), and fruit (the application). In this chapter we will dig into the “roots” of the sermon and consider its introduction.

We will look at the necessity of an introduction, the negatives of an introduction, and the nature of an introduction.

The Necessity of an Introduction

There are two reasons why our sermons should have an introduction.

1. Ordinary Human Experience

In our ordinary everyday social contact with other people we are accustomed to a gradual introduction before the main topic of conversation is introduced. Whether on the phone or in person, we usually spend some time identifying each other and preparing the ground for discussion of the relevant issue. Indeed, we would consider it rude and offensive for someone to abruptly announce the topic of conversation and launch into it. This is simple common sense. Just as music has a prelude, and dramas have a prologue, so sermons have an introduction.

2. Sinful Human Experience

The preacher has to remember that he is speaking on subjects which the depraved hearts of men and woman are averse to and opposed to. Even Christians often arrive in Church with worldly thoughts and feelings, their souls chilled and deadened by ordinary life in this world. Though the preacher has been warmed by studying his subject, most of his hearers are coming to it cold.

When he is all fire and they as yet are ice, a sudden contact between his mind and theirs will produce rather a shock and revulsion than sympathetic harmony.
- Robert L. Dabney



Archibald Alexander warned his students to take great care in preparing their introductions. He warned: “It is a great mistake to suppose that the introduction and application of a sermon require little study. Perhaps they require the exercise of invention and ingenuity more than any other part of a sermon.” So, the necessity of an introduction should encourage careful preparation. Don’t let the ship strike the wall when just getting out of the harbor.

The Negatives of an Introduction

Here are some things to avoid when introducing a sermon.

1. Don't be too long

Over-lengthy introductions imbalance the sermon, waste time, and weary the congregation. An introduction should contain only one leading thought.

2. Don't be too showy

Some preachers think that they will get their hearers attention by displaying their historical, cultural, or literary learning in their introduction. Shun the sensational and anything that smacks of display.

3. Don't be too ambitious

Trying to link a distant event or saying with the subject of the sermon by a long series of elaborate leaps in logic will not be persuasive. The introduction must be clearly relevant to the body of the sermon.

4. Don't be too personal

To start with a personal story now and again may be acceptable but not as a general rule.

5. Don't be too loud

The introduction is meant to be a gradual awakening not a bugle in the ear which exhausts the preacher for the main body of the sermon. Save your steam for the "hot" parts.

6. Don't be too predictable

One writer has argued that a good introduction to a sermon would only be good for that sermon and for no other. If it is adaptable to other sermons then it probably is too general and vague. Try to avoid stereotypical and predictable introductions. Sometimes it may be useful to give a brief introduction before reading the text.

7. Don't steal the sermon's thunder

The introduction should pave the way for the sermon, not repeat it. If you introduce later material from the main body of the sermon in the introduction, you end up repeating the introduction.

8. Don't be apologetic

Preachers must not introduce their sermons with an apology for themselves or their sermons. This will not excite sympathy in the hearers but contempt. Preachers are authorized and authoritative ambassadors of Christ and must convey that.

9. Don't flatter

Preacher's who begin by flattering their audiences will be regarded as insincere sycophants.

10. Don't be offensive

Great care must be taken not to offend taste especially at the beginning, when first impressions are so important. Have a regard to the age and sensitivities of your congregation.

The Nature of an Introduction

Let us now consider the various types of sermon introduction.

1. The “Pay Attention” Introduction

Sometimes the preacher might begin with a solemn call for attention to an important subject. This was done in scripture by Moses (Deut. 4:1), Stephen (Acts 7:2), and the Lord (Mat. 15:10). But such a request for attention will lose its force if it is repeated every sermon. It is usually best to say something that will interest rather than demand interest. “What is the best way,” asked a young preacher of an older one, “to get the attention of the congregation?” “Give ‘em something to attend to,” was the gruff reply.

2. The Contextual Introduction

This is one of the more common types of introduction, where the preacher will explain the connections and relations between the text and the surrounding material. This has the benefit of keeping the text central in the sermon and in the minds of the hearers.

3. The Background Introduction

Here the preacher will explain the history, or geography, or culture of the people and places relevant to the text or the context.

4. The Principle Introduction

In this case the preacher will begin with a principle which is familiar to the hearers and proceed to show in the sermon how a particular example proves the principle. Any statement of principle should be positive, brief, bold and exact.

5. The Example Introduction

This is really a reversal of the “Principle Introduction.” Here the preacher begins with a real-life example which illustrates a principle he is about to preach upon. The example must have gravity and dignity so as not to jar with the sacred material to follow in the sermon. Dabney recounts how a New Year’s sermon on the text, “This year thou shalt die” was introduced by the statement that both Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Davies preached from this passage at the beginning of the years in which they were unexpectedly cut off by death.

A made-up example may also be used now and again as long as its fictional character is noted.

6. A Contrast Introduction

This is again related to the previous two types of introduction, except in this case a commonly held worldly principle or well-known example of worldly conduct is contrasted with Scriptural principles or examples which are then preached upon.

7. A Topical Introduction

The preacher can often gain attention and arouse interest by preaching on a subject of current national or ecclesiastical interest. How many sermons in recent weeks have begun with “Haiti...”

8. An Advantages Introduction

A sermon may be introduced by highlighting the advantages – intellectual, emotional, spiritual, or practical – which attend the study of a particular subject. This is especially useful when the subject may be especially sensitive or offensive to the natural heart of men and women.

9. A Seasonal Introduction

Reference to a particular time of year in the national, local, or ecclesiastical calendar may profitably form material for sermon introductions.

10. An Apologetic Introduction

This is not a contradiction of the earlier negative: “Don’t be apologetic.” This is a reference to the need for the preacher to confront error and heresy in the church and outside it. He may begin with a reference to a person, a cult, or an organization which holds a particular view and then go on to prove its falsehood and assert the biblical truth.

Conclusion

Just as a tree has roots to place and secure the tree in the ground, so a sermon must have an introduction to place and secure it in the minds of the congregation. In the next chapter we will consider the sermon’s “trunk” and “branches” – its organization.

References

- Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), 141.
James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 98.

Organization (I)

The principles of sermon organization

Introduction

In the previous chapter we studied sermon introductions, which we likened to the roots of a tree. We would now like to look at the trunk, the main body of the sermon. Homiletics teachers give this various names: the division, the development, the argument, the treatment, the proof, or the discussion.

I am assuming here that the work of textual exegesis has already been done (see chapter 3). What we are concerned with now is the organizing of the resulting material.

In this chapter we will examine the principles of sermon organization. In the next chapter we will look at the practice of sermon organization. In other words, we will look at the theory and then at a number of practical examples.

The Principles

1. Structured

The preacher is described as, “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). This means that a major part of the preacher’s task is to divide the word of God into appropriate blocks of material. His sermons should have a plan or a structure. This means that the main block of sermon material will be divided into two or more smaller and distinct blocks of material which are then presented in logical sequence.

Sometimes this plan will be obvious before the preacher even begins to question the text. Sometimes it will arise as he works on it, and sometimes it will only arise after the work of exegesis is completed. In sermon preparation, the preacher should be constantly seeking a structure. And even when one emerges, the question should be, “Is this the best one?” The preacher must be prepared to dispense with his initial structure if another emerges which better presents the subject.

The major benefit of structure, apart from helping the preacher to present his material, is that it greatly aids retention of the message by the listeners.

2. Simple

Sermon structures ought to be as simple as possible, with as few divisions as possible. Many sermons have suffered from over-elaborate analysis and an over-multiplication of divisions and sub-divisions, making them more like lectures than sermons. Multiple divisions tend to attract attention more to the structure of the message rather than to the message itself. They also tend to over-tax the memory and make the listening exercise more mind-centered than heart-centered, more cerebral than spiritual.

What is the ideal number of divisions? There is no hard and fast rule, but three is generally thought to be the most effective for listeners as it presents the material with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Minute division of a text, or unnecessary elaboration of points that are obvious, serve no purpose if preaching is to be useful and edifying. Hearers will be either annoyed at the unnecessary minutiae, or despondent that they cannot remember the divisions and sub-points. It is an interesting observation that some of the greatest sermons are deceptively simple in design and development. Simplicity in design, organization and development is the mark of a great communicator. Complexity confounds – simplicity satisfies.

- James W. Alexander



3. Striking

The preacher should strive to ensure that his headings are fresh and striking. Vividness and variety should be the aim so that the hearer's attention will be immediately aroused.



So many sermons follow the beaten track, in which we can see all that is coming, as to make it a weary task even for devout hearers to listen attentively. One feels inclined to utter a plaintive cry, 'Worthy brother, excellent brother, if you could only manage to drive us sometimes over a different road, even if much less smooth, even if you do not know it very well – I am so tired of this!'

- John Broadus

4. Stated

There has been much debate over how much of the theme or subject should be stated at the beginning of a sermon. Some of the older writers argue for a concise statement of the sermon subject before beginning the sermon proper. This is a short phrase or sentence which contains the proposition of the sermon and will usually reflect the structure. It may be long or short, logical or rhetorical. It may be framed as an indicative, an imperative, an exhortation, or an interrogative. Whether the preacher states this openly at the beginning of his sermon, it is important that the preacher himself is able to encapsulate the point of his sermon in such a proposition for his own benefit in both preparation and delivery. He should be asking, "What is it that I am trying to achieve here today?" "What is my purpose?"

The preacher must have one main subject of discourse, to which he adheres with supreme reference throughout. But this is not enough. He must, second, propose to himself one definite impression on the hearer's soul, to the making of which everything in the sermon is bent...Unity of discourse requires, then, not only singleness of a dominant subject, but also singleness of practical impression. To secure the former see to it that the whole discussion may admit of reduction to a single proposition. To secure the latter, let the preacher hold before him, through the whole preparation of the sermon, the one practical effect intended to be produced upon the hearer's will."

- Robert L. Dabney

Another question arises over whether the sermon divisions should be announced at the beginning. Most homiletics teachers would say that the general answer is, "No." The argument is that pre-announcement removes the element of surprise and precludes spontaneity. It also might encourage some to switch-off if they wrongly conclude from the headings that the sermon is not for them.

The only occasions when pre-announcement might be desirable is when the train of thought is especially difficult to follow and a preview of the structure will help to follow it; or when it is especially important for the successive steps in an exposition to be noted; or when it is judged that pre-announcement will awaken interest rather than diminish it.

On the whole, though, I agree with Shedd who thought that animated re-capitulation at the end of the sermon is better than dry pre-announcement at the beginning.



The proper image of rhetorical unity is not found in the star which scatters its rays on every side from one point of light, to be absorbed and lost in the darkness of space, but in the lens which collects many parallel or even dissentient rays into one burning focus.

- Robert L. Dabney

5. Smooth

There should be movement or progress in the structure. People must feel that they are moving towards the flowers and fruit at the top of the tree. The movement from point to point should not be irregular and illogical and neither should there be significant interruptions, pauses, and gaps in the argument. The parts should fit well together "like well-cut stones which need no cement." Each should grow out of the latter by natural development. Ease of transition will be in proportion to the study expended. If the transition is difficult we should ask if our arrangement is correct. Or we may be trying to work in some idea which has no place in the sermon.

Three detached sermonettes do not make one sermon; but, on the other hand, a handful of observations tied together by a text are not an organic whole. It all depends on whether the heads advance, ascend, cumulate, or are independent, disconnected, parallel. Heads are either watertight compartments, in which case you cannot pass from one to the other, and are exasperated by the iron door, or they are floors of a tower, in which case one will not halt till he reaches the top, because with every fresh ascent he gets a wider view

- John Watson

In general, negatives should precede positives, the abstract should precede the concrete, generals should precede specifics, instruction and conviction should precede appeal.

6. Symmetrical

This does not mean every part is the same size, although gross imbalance should be avoided as it suggests that we have not divided our matter properly. What this does mean is that each part should reflect the symmetry of the text. The divisions should all sustain the same kind of relation to the subject. Sometimes a preacher may have divisions which are branches of the trees and others are but branches of branches.

7. Spoken

The divisions must be suited to spoken announcement. Logical divisions may help in preparation, but the preacher is a speaker and should bear in mind the difference between logical and rhetorical divisions. This is why alliterative headings are often to be aimed at. Or, if not headings with the same letter, then aim to have headings of the same length or rhythm.

8. Separate

Divisions should not overlap but should be set forth as distinctly as possible. When one thought may legitimately be given in either of two divisions, decide which is the best and stick to it

9. Spiritual

When we say that sermon structures should be spiritual we are saying that the sermon material should be organized throughout with a spiritual intent – with the aim of doing spiritual good. This means that application should not be left to the end of the sermon, leaving the main part of the sermon as an arid waste of mere facts and information.

In order to do good by preaching, the attention of the audience must be gained and kept up; and some impression made on their feelings.

- James W. Alexander



The Word should be applied to the hearers in a relevant way throughout. Application will gain interest for the information, which then in turn deepens the force of the appeal.

The successive waves of emotion may thus rise higher and higher to the end. And besides, while thought produces emotion, it is also true that emotion reacts upon and quickens thought, so that impressive application of one division may secure for the next a closer attention.”

- John Broadus



10. Scriptural

Although this is really the most important point of all, we put it last for emphasis. In general, the sermon structure will arise obviously from the text of Scripture.

Ideally, sermon outlines will arise out of a text, after careful study of the context and meaning of the passage to be preached upon. Care must be taken not to impose an outline on a text that does not arise naturally from the text.

- James W. Alexander



Conclusion

We can learn to structure sermons by examining the sermons of the best preachers, by having our own structures critiqued by other preachers, and also by the study of logic.

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James W. Alexander, *Thoughts on Preaching*, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 104, 96, 103.

John Broadus, *The Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co, 1929), 278, 292.

Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures on Sacred Rhetoric* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979), 109, 111

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Organization (2)

The practice of sermon organization

Introduction

In this lecture we will take some of the principles of organization introduced in the previous study and put them into practice. We will look at various practical ways of organizing our sermons.

The Practice

1. Nouns

Perhaps the easiest and most obvious structure is based upon the subjects in the verse or passage being studied.

Examples

Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost (Lk. 15:6).

1. The sheep's lostness
2. The shepherd's love

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head (Luke 7:44 ff).

1. The sinner
2. Simon
3. The Savior

2. Adjectives

The preacher may also use various adjectives to describe a person, an event, or an occasion in the text.

Who is on the Lord's side? (Ex. 32:26).

1. A clear question
2. An important question
3. An urgent question
4. A divisive question

3. Verbs

Another approach is to organize the sermon around the verbs found in the text.

Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee (Ps. 84:6).

1. A reviving
2. A rejoicing

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (Prov. 28:13).

1. Covering sin
2. Confessing sin

4. Questions

A sermon can be structured around the questions which may be asked of the text.

Seek ye the Lord while he may be found (Isa. 55:6).

1. What is missing?
2. Why should I search for this?
3. Where should I search?
4. When should I search?
5. How should I search?
6. Who is to search?

5. Imperatives

If a text contains commands, then the sermon can easily be arranged around these commands.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:19-20).

1. Go
2. Teach
3. Baptize

6. Metaphor

The Bible is rich in metaphors and the suggestive imagery can help the preacher form a structure.

The Lord God is a sun (Ps. 84:11).

Like the sun, God....

1. Is Hot
2. Is Huge
3. Is High
4. Is Here
5. Heals
6. Gives Happiness
7. Hardens

7. Application

Instead of structuring our sermons around our exegesis, we can sometimes structure it around our application and support the application with our exegesis.

And when the Devil had ended all the temptations, he departed from him for a season. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee (Luke 4:13-14).

1. Temptation comes to the most holy
2. Temptation is a test of faith
3. Temptation is beaten by truth
4. Temptation resisted is rewarded

8. Emotions

The different emotions expressed by Bible characters may provide sermons headings.

Why art thou cast down my soul....hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Ps. 42: 11).

1. A Sad Soul
2. A Smiling Soul

9. Contrasts

Contrasts abound in Scripture and often provide a ready-made "skeleton" for a sermon.

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones (Isa. 57:15).

1. God is far away in the high and holy heavens
2. God is near in the humble human heart

10. Biography

Sermons on Bible characters may be organized around their various experiences.

And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart ... Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians (Daniel 5:22-28).

1. His sins/folly
2. His scare/fright
3. His sentence/future

11. Responses

The different responses of different people to a situation can also structure a sermon.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding; and they would not come... (Matt. 22:2ff)

The responses:

1. Apathy
2. Activity
3. Aggression
4. Acceptance

Entreat me not to leave thee...(Ruth 1).

1. A grieving widow
2. A leaving widow
3. A cleaving widow

12. Cause and Effect

The effects of certain actions and attitudes can be traced to the original causes.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12).

1. Iniquity abounding
2. Love abating

13. Moral Principles

The preacher may wish to draw out the moral principles latent in a passage and use these as his sermon headings.

Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword (Matt. 26:52)

1. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual (2 Cor. 10:4)
2. Blessed are the peacemakers (Matt. 5:9)
3. Whoso sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed (Gen. 9:6)
4. Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord (Rom. 12:19)
5. The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost (Lk. 19:10)
6. The word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12)

14. Textual

Sometimes the text will yield an obvious structure.

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:11).

1. Reckon yourselves dead to sin
2. Reckon yourselves alive to God

15. Past/Present/Future

A number of texts have temporal reference points which can also provide our sermon points.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:30-31)

1. The past: Compassion
2. The present: Command
3. The future: Conclusion

16. Before and after

Related to the previous suggestion is the structure founded upon "before" and "after" comparisons.

Lo this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Eccl. 7:29).

1. God's good invention
2. Man's bad invention

17. Causes, Consequences, Cures

The medical approach of cause, consequence, and cure can be used to open up a text and structure a sermon.

The poor shall never cease out of the land (Deut. 15:11).

1. The causes of poverty
2. The consequences of poverty
3. The cure of poverty

18. Question and Answer

A verse or passage may ask and answer a question in such a way that a sermon can be built around.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors... (Rom. 8:35-37).

1. Question: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
2. Answer: Nothing

19. Pairs

A preacher should be on the look out for "pairs."

"Enter ye in at the strait gate..." (Matt. 7:13-14).

1. Two gates
2. Two roads
3. Two destinations

20. Positive and Negative

Truth is often presented negatively and positively.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17).

1. Do not trust in uncertain riches
2. Do trust in the certain God

Conclusion

These are just some samples of the many and varied structures by which sermons may be organized. You may want to review your own past sermons' structures in order to identify other alternative organizing methods. You may also want to use the suggestions in this chapter in order to vary your own approach in presenting the truth.

Application (I)

The principles of application

Introduction

We will consider the principles of application in this chapter, and the practice of application in the next. But before looking at the principles of application we will briefly consider the meaning of “application,” and then the scriptural justification for application. First, here are some definitions of application:



Application is the...process by which preachers make scriptural truths so pertinent to members of their congregations that they not only understand how these truths should effect changes in their lives but also feel obligated and perhaps even eager to implement those changes.

- Jay Adams

Application is the arduous task of suffusing the sermon with pointed, specific, and discriminating force to the conscience.

- Al Martin



My own definition is: Application is the process by which the unchanging principles of God's word are brought into life-changing contact with people who live in an ever-changing world.

This may seem obvious. However, some exegetes of Scripture think that once they have explained the meaning of the text, their work is done. They make no attempt to determine what the text means for people now. Exegesis then becomes a merely academic and scholarly exercise detached from real life.

Other exegetes do have a desire to connect Scripture with real life, but believe that is the job of the Holy Spirit, not the preacher. They say, “We explain the text and the Spirit applies it.” This tends to leave the hearers at the mercy of their own subjective inclinations.

The exegete, who has come to know the passage best, refuses to help the reader or hearer of the passage at the very point where the reader's or hearer's interest is keenest. The exegete leaves the key function – response – completely to the subjective sensibilities of the reader or hearer, who knows the passage least.

- Douglas Stuart

What is even more likely is that the hearers will do nothing at all.

If we leave it to men's choice to follow what is taught them, they will never move one foot. Therefore, the doctrine of itself can profit nothing at all.
- John Calvin



Second, we need to show that application is warranted and justified by Scripture. We do this by highlighting just some of the many examples of application which we find in the Bible itself.

In Matthew 19:16-22 Christ applied the law to the rich young ruler. In Acts 2:22-27 Peter applied the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament to his generation. In 1 Corinthians 10:11 Paul says that the history of Israel was written as an example and admonition to all later generations. Finally, Paul affirms that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).



Where the application begins, there the sermon begins.
- Charles H. Spurgeon

Having made these two preliminary points let us now look at the principles of application.

The Principles

1. Preaching Passage

It may appear to be stating the obvious to say that application should be based upon the Bible, and particularly the Bible passage being preached upon. However, it does need to be re-stated as the Bible is increasingly set aside in many churches. In its place have come moving stories and personal anecdotes from which "morals" are drawn, or in which "inspiration" is found. But the faithful preacher must base his application on God's Word, and on the particular passage which his sermon has been about.

Application must be based on the Bible, and upon the particular preaching passage of that day. However, preachers must also ensure that their application is consistent with the rest of Scripture. We must be careful not to found a doctrine or practice on an isolated or "obscure" text or chapter, without checking that the doctrine or practice is consistent with the message of Scripture as a whole.

An application should be just as rigorous, just as thorough, and just as analytically sound as any other step in the exegesis process. It cannot be merely tacked on to the rest of the exegesis as a sort of spiritual afterthought. Moreover it must carefully reflect the data of the passage if it is to be convincing. Your reader needs to see how you derived the application as the natural and final stage of the entire process of careful, analytical study of your passage.
- Douglas Stuart

2. Primary

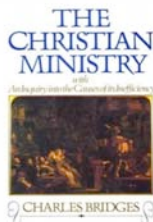
We must not draw our applications from the accidental, incidental, or coincidental parts of a passage, but from its essentials alone. This is especially important to bear in mind when preaching from historical narratives or parables. Often the parables are making only one point, and so we must not found a doctrine or practice on one of the incidental points. An old Baptist minister used to tell young preachers, “Don’t turn a monopod into a centipede.” One of the best ways of finding the primary application(s) of a particular passage is by asking, “What was the original application, to the original audience, at the original time of writing?”

The truth God revealed in Scripture came in an applied form and should be reapplied to the same sort of people for the same purposes for which it was originally given. That is to say, truth should be applied today just as God originally applied it.
- Jay Adams



3. Persistent

Although at times it may be appropriate to leave application to the conclusion of a sermon, it is usually best to apply throughout. Jay Adams writes of applicatory introductions as well as conclusions, and argues that application “should begin with the first sentence and continue throughout. This is going a bit far, but there should be persistent application throughout, at least after every substantive point.



The method of perpetual application, therefore, where the subject will admit of it, is probably best calculated for effect - applying each head distinctly
- Charles Bridges

4. Prepared

While many preachers will spend hours on preparing their exegesis, they will often spend minimal if any time on application. Sometimes this is for “spiritual” reasons. The preacher may point to texts such as Matthew 10:19 and say that the Spirit will provide the words in accordance with his promise. However, promises of the Spirit’s help to speak without preparation were given to those facing arrests, court trials and other dangers. They were not applicable to ordinary preaching situations.

An application should be just as rigorous, just as thorough, and just as analytically sound as any other step in the exegesis process.
- Douglas Stuart

Unprepared application usually means repetitive and ineffectual application, as the preacher, now mentally tired after the exertions of explaining his

text, resorts to the well-worn tramlines of application he has travelled down time and again in the past.

One of the best ways to prepare applications is to pray over your sermon and ask God to show you how to apply it. God's Spirit knows the hearts of your hearers better than you do, and He can reveal people's needs to you by His Spirit. A prayerful spirit while preaching can result in God guiding you to speak to specific needs in your hearers. Also, as the fear of man can ensnare and so disable application, we need to pray for constant deliverance from it.

5. Present

Our applications should be up-to-date and related to the present. There is no point in simply taking the applications made by the Puritans and Reformers and repeating them verbatim to our own modern congregations. Their applications were up-to-date when they made them, but many of them are now past their "use by" date.

One of the greatest helps to application is keeping up-to-date with both the world we live in and the people we pastor. Only then can we know what our people are troubled with, concerned about, interested in, and in danger of, and so preach to these needs.

Another way to improve your application is to go through your congregation and try to describe each person with one word which characterizes their spiritual condition or status. You will then have a ready-made checklist of the various kinds of hearers in your congregation to focus your application on. To get you started here are some broad categories of listeners which you might aim application at:

Broad categories

Christian/non-Christian, Old/Young, Rich/Poor, Parents/Children/Singles, Employer/Employee, Government/Citizen, Male/Female, Atheist/Agnostic/Persecutor.

And here are some narrower categories of people which may be found in some, many, or even all of each of the broader categories:

Narrow categories

The sick, dying, afflicted, tempted, backslidden, hypocrite, immoral, discouraged, worried, tired, seeking salvation/assurance, doubter, proud, bereaved, broken-hearted, convicted, etc.

6. Personal

Daniel Webster exclaimed, "When a man preaches to me, I want him to make it a personal matter, a personal matter, a personal matter! What does this mean? Well, "personal" application starts with the preacher applying the word to himself.

Here is the main reason why there is so little applicatory preaching. Men are not applying the Word to their own hearts. A minister's life is the life of the minister.

- Al Martin



However, what we want to focus on here especially is the importance of “second-person” application.

Application may sometimes be in the “first-person.” There are times when the preacher will identify personally with the application. He will then speak in “first-person” terms: “We must...”, “...died for us”, “our privilege is...” (e.g. Heb. 4:1, 11, 14, 16).

Application may also, at times, be in the “third-person.” For example, a sermon may be preached to young people on the duties of husbands or wives, when none of the hearers are yet married. The sermon will then speak in third person terms: “Husbands will...”, “When wives are...”, “She usually knows...” Perhaps there will be application concerning the errors of false religions and the cults, again in terms of “They wrongly believe and teach...” (e.g. Titus 1:10-16; Jn. 3:5).

However, while first-person and third-person applications are both scriptural and, at times, appropriate, the majority of our applications should be in the “second-person”: “You must...”, “You should understand...”, “Your experience...” (e.g. Jn. 3:7; Rom. 12:1).

This is not to exclude the preacher from the application. However, it does reflect the fact that the preacher holds an “office.” He is not preaching in his own right, but as an ambassador sent by God to deliver a message to the people of God. He therefore speaks “in Christ’s stead,” as Christ himself would speak to the people were he present. Your hearers must know that they are being addressed personally and even individually.

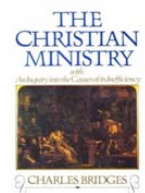
Many sermons are like unaddressed, unsigned letters which if 100 people read it they would not think the contents concerned them.

- Al Martin



Preaching, in order to be effective, must be reduced from vague generalities, to a tangible, individual character – coming home to every man’s business, and even his bosom.

- Charles Bridges



The newspaper editor of the Brooklyn Eagle

kept a desktop notice saying, “Always remember that a dog fight in Brooklyn is more important than a revolution in China.” Is there an equivalent for preachers?

7. Pointed

It is not enough just to draw a general principle out of a passage (“you should be holy”) but this general principle must be pointed to specific, concrete, everyday situations. “You should be holy” answers the “what?” question. Only by answering the “who?”, “when”, “where?”, “how?”, “why?” questions, do our applications become pointed.

Application is answering two questions: So what? And Now what? The first question asks, “Why is this passage important to me?” The second asks, “What should I do about it today?”

- David Veerman

We dare not leave our hearers to make the point to themselves. Charles Bridges said: “We must not expect our hearers to apply to themselves such unpalatable truths. So unnatural is this habit of personal application, that most will fit the doctrine to anyone but themselves.”

One of the most effective ways of giving our sermons “point” is by trying to direct all our applications to one overall applicatory aim, rather than just a disparate disconnected series of exhortations. Bryan Chapell argues that this should be done at the very end of a sermon:

The last sixty seconds are typically the most dynamic moments in excellent sermons. With these final words, a preacher marshals the thought and emotion of an entire message into an exhortation that makes all that has preceded clear and compelling. A conclusion is a sermon's destination. Ending contents are alive-packed with tension, drama, energy, and emotion.
- Bryan Chapell



NB: When God's Word is applied to people's hearts there will be friction which causes pain and heat. When we apply the point of the sword of truth we can expect both action and reaction!

8. Passion

There is no part of the sermon which requires more of the preacher's emotional involvement. The arguments have been made; now is the time for persuasion.

To produce volition, it is not enough that the understanding be convinced; affection must also be aroused.
- Robert L. Dabney



To do this, the preacher's own feelings must reflect the nature of the application. If warning, then let there be solemnity; if worshipping, let there be devotion; if promising, let there be confidence; if comforting, let there be tenderness; if commanding, let there be authority, and so on.



The preacher's soul should here show itself fired with the force of the truth which has been developed, and glowing both with light and heat. The quality of unction should suffuse the end of your discourse, and bathe the truth in evangelical emotion. But this emotion must be genuine and not assumed; it must be spiritual, the zeal of heavenly love, and not the carnal heat of the mental gymnastic....It must disclose itself spontaneously and unannounced, as the gushing of a fountain which will not be suppressed. What can give this glow except the indwelling of the Holy Ghost? You are thus led again to that great, ever-recurring deduction, the first qualification of the sacred orator, the grace of Christ.
- Robert L. Dabney

This is what Samuel Rutherford referred to when he spoke of the need to preach a “felt Christ.”

Conclusion

It is on this appeal for more Christ-centered application that I want to close this chapter. In a sense, this is the most important point in the whole chapter, because Christ-centered application will deliver us from mere moralizing and latent legalism.

What is Christ-centered application? Well, if preaching from Biblical history, then show how that history either pre-figures and points to Christ, or how it eventually leads to him. If preaching from the Psalms, show how appropriate they are for worshipping Christ. If preaching from the Proverbs, show how Christ is the ultimate Wisdom of God. If preaching from the prophets, show how they predict Christ. If preaching from the law, show how it reveals our need of Christ. If preaching practical duties, show how to motivate obedience by love to Christ. If preaching Christ's words, show how they magnify the Christ who spoke them. If preaching on suffering, show how they bring us into fellowship with Christ's sufferings. If preaching duty, then show how Christ forgives our many failings in the line of duty. If preaching about love, show the example of Christ. If preaching about sin, show Christ as the only Saviour from sin. Let all our application lead to the feet of Christ.

I don't want people leaving my church saying, 'What a wonderful sermon - what a wonderful preacher.' I want them to go out saying, 'I will do something.'
- Massillion

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Application (2)

The practice of application

Introduction

In the last chapter, we examined some of the principles of sermon application. Now we will consider the practice of sermon application. Specifically we will look at 20 methods of sermon application – 20 ways in which Scripture may be used in a life-changing way. We will (i) briefly explain each method, (ii) give an example from Scripture to justify each method, then (iii) give a sermon example. The main point is to show Scriptural support for each way of applying Scripture. If we can do that then we are justified in using that method of application. Each of these 20 methods fits the following definition of application:

Application is the process by which the unchanging principles of God's word are brought into life-changing contact with people who live in an ever-changing world.

The Practice

I. Declaration

“Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative,” said Gresham Machen. The sermon, then, is an authoritative declaration of divinely inspired facts. The preacher is communicating vital information from the all-knowing God to largely ignorant human beings. This process of replacing ignorance with knowledge, and falsehood with facts is, in itself, the first application of God's Word. It is a potentially powerful transforming experience for the hearer, as his ignorance and prejudices are replaced with knowledge and truth. By announcing God's Word with authority, the preacher is saying, “It is vital that you know these facts...” He is not in the business of suggestion, but of declaration, assertion, and affirmation. Remembering this first application of God's Word, changes “lectures” into “sermons.” Authoritative declarations of the truth also establish and confirm the faith of God's people.

Scripture Example

In Acts 17:22ff Paul preaches the knowledge of God to ignorant and prejudiced hearers. He announces and declares life-changing historical and theological facts.

Sermon Example

A sermon on “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8) benefits its hearers by replacing misunderstanding and misconceptions about God's love with clear and accurate knowledge of it. This, of itself, is life-transforming knowledge.

2. Exclamation

Information is made more memorable and engaging when it is applied by way of exclamation. The declaration of the truth is accompanied with heightened emotion as the preacher expresses his approval or disapproval of what he is saying. It was Spurgeon who said that the preacher should pepper his sermons with many “Oh’s...” and “Ah’s...” An exclamative phrase may also begin with “What...” or “How...” For example, “What a great Saviour!” or “How great God is!” The exclamative shows the preacher’s appreciation or deprecation of what is being preached and encourages the congregation to enjoy it or denounce it with him. It appeals to the heart as well as the head.

Scripture Example

The Psalms are full of exclamation (Pss. 8:1,9; 73:19; 104:24). After explaining the mysterious and awesome sovereignty of God, the Apostle exclaims, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33). Also, see Matthew 23 for Christ’s sevenfold woes as he deprecates the Pharisees.

Sermon Example

When preaching on the beauty of Christ, instead of stating coldly, “Christ is beautiful,” the preacher movingly exclaimed “O, the beauty of Christ!” This applies the truth to the feelings and inflames the heart.

3. Interrogation

Having given the information, and invited the congregation to enjoy it, the preacher then challenges his hearers with questions about their own relation to these truths.

Scripture Example

Interrogation abounds in Romans. For example: “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? (Rom. 2:21). Notice also Isaiah’s use of rhetorical questions in Isaiah 40:12-14.

Sermon Example

A preacher concluded a sermon on doing religious things only to be seen and applauded by men (Matt. 6:1-6), with a series of questions: “Why do you come to church? To be seen of men, or to see God? Why do you pray? So that others will hear, or so that God will hear?”

4. Obligation

The preacher takes the truth and lays practical obligations on his congregation by giving them imperatives and commands which follow logically from the truth.

Scripture Example

In Exodus 20, God says I redeemed you (v. 1-2), therefore obey me (v. 3-17). Paul concludes the substantially doctrinal part of Romans (chapter 1-11) with a number of imperatives in chapter 12.

Sermon Example

A sermon on the lukewarm church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:16) was permeated with imperatives such as, "Be zealous... committed...serious...wholehearted...single-minded...etc."

5. Exhortation

Somewhat less confrontational than the imperative is the hortatory "Let us..." With the exhortation the preacher takes more of a sympathetic and involved stance.

Scripture Example

The Apostle Paul addresses his fellow converted Jews in the letter to the Hebrews with a number of mutual exhortations. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace...(Heb. 4:16; c.f. 4:1; 4:11; 6:1).

Sermon Example

In a sermon on the condescension of Christ in his incarnation (Phil. 2:5-11), the preacher followed the apostles application, with mutual exhortations to peace, unity, and humility (2:3) in imitation of Christ (2:5).

6. Motivation

Sometimes the preacher may add to 1-5 (above) the motives for information, exclamation, interrogation, obligation and exhortation. He can increase the likelihood of his hearers receiving the information, joining him in the exclamation, answering the interrogation, binding themselves to the obligation, and agreeing with the exhortation by giving scriptural motives for doing so.

Scripture Example

In 1 Corinthians 15:34 the apostle commanded his hearers, "Awake to righteousness, and sin not..." and then adds this motivating reason, "for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame."

Sermon Example

When informing his congregation about the deceitful and desperately wicked nature of the human heart (Jer. 17:9), the preacher motivated his hearers to listen and respond by explaining the vital importance of knowing our disease if we are ever to seek the right cure.

7. Imitation

The preacher may take Old Testament history as an example of how believers should or should not act in similar circumstances.

Scripture Example

After highlighting parts of Israel's history, Paul said to the Corinthians, "Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (1 Cor. 10:6, 11).

Sermon Example

At least one lesson from David facing Goliath (1 Sam. 17) is that the Christian should confront the enemies of God and His people. But the motivation and power for this must also be given: "the name of the Lord."

8. Illustration

Sometimes the best way to apply a truth is by illustration or metaphor, by telling a story or painting a picture. If the story is powerful enough it will apply the truth without you making the obvious connections

Scripture Example

When Jesus wanted to apply the teaching of "Love your neighbor as yourself" he told the story of the "Good Samaritan" (Lk.10:29-37).

Sermon Example

When a preacher wanted to emphasize the importance of "keeping the heart" (Prov. 4:23) he used the illustration of a computer's main chip, its Central Processing Unit, and how it impacts on everything else.

9. Quotation

A preacher may apply Scripture by showing the truth and its relevance from the sayings and writings of others. This may help to buttress and emphasize the lessons in the sermon. There are many examples of the biblical authors using previously written Scripture in this way. However, there are also examples of the biblical authors using secular writers to help apply the truth.

Scripture Example

Apart from frequently quoting Old Testament scripture, Paul quoted one of the Greek poets to support one of his points during his sermon in Athens (Acts 17:28).

Sermon Example

One preacher found that quoting the words of Spurgeon or Lloyd-Jones to support his teaching, made his listeners more likely to receive the teaching. Another used the words of famous non-Christians to show the despair and meaninglessness in even the most "successful" worldly lives. Such quotes can have a dramatic impact on unconverted hearers.

10. Conversation

One of the best ways to get truth into real life is to set up a dialogue or conversation between two people. It may be a debate between the preacher and an opponent, or it may be between the preacher and a genuine seeker after the truth.

Scripture Example

In the book of Romans, Paul frequently set up dialogues between himself and an opponent in order to apply the truth (Rom. 3:1-9; 6:1-3).

Sermon Example

In a sermon on creation (Gen. 1), a preacher applied the truth by carrying on an imaginary conversation between himself and an evolutionist, answering the evolutionists questions and challenging him in return.

11. Condemnation

Once the truth is taught, it may often be necessary for distortions and denials of the truth to be highlighted and condemned.

Scripture Example

Most of Jude's epistle is an exposure and condemnation of false teachers in the Church of Christ.

Sermon Example

A sermon on the once-for-all uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ's death (Heb. 10:14), was concluded with reference to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church regarding the ongoing sacrifice of Christ in the Mass, which the preacher showed to be both blasphemous and dangerous doctrine.

12. Invitation

Having set Christ forth, the preacher must then call sinners to Him.

Scripture Example

In Psalm 2, the Psalmist concludes his description of the Messiah's ultimate victory over his foes with, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way..." (Ps. 2:12).

Sermon Example

No sermon on Christ as the good shepherd (Jn. 10:14), could conclude without the hearers being called upon to follow him and be fed by him.

13. Demonstration

Sometimes it is not enough for preachers to simply urge their hearers to do this or that. They must show how to do this or that.

Scripture Example

When the Ten Commandments are given in Exodus 20, the following chapters give a number of concrete examples of how to obey them.

Sermon Example

A preacher who was urging his hearers to evangelize the lost on the basis of “Ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8), spent a large part of his sermon on the practicalities of how to evangelize in specific situations.

14. Adoration

It should be natural for a preacher to feel adoration welling up within his heart as he preaches the truth. And, as his devotional spirit is excited, he may let out expressions of worship or even brief petitions heavenwards. Such spontaneous uses of the truth bring its reality and importance home to the hearers.

Scripture Example

In the Psalms, the writers often move from “third-person” narratives about God to “second-person” addresses of praise to God (Ps. 106:4, 47)

Sermon Example

When preaching on the everlasting destruction of sinners, a preacher found himself frequently turning from his congregation to God and saying things like, “Lord Jesus, you are merciful... Gracious Lord, save us all from hell...”

15. Admonition

The congregation may need to be rebuked or admonished, leading to confession.

Scripture Example

Isaiah 1-39 sets forth God as the only hope for Israel, and in the light of that repeatedly admonishes and rebukes the people for turning away from God to ungodly nations to be their savior (Isa. 30).

Sermon Example

Someone preaching on “Love not the world...” (1 Jn. 2:15) rebuked his hearer’s worldliness and lead the congregation in confessing, “Holy God, we have loved the world, we have copied the world, we have followed the world, we have admired the world... Turn us and we shall be turned.”

16. Consolation

There are times when a congregation need comfort and encouragement with the truth.

Scripture Example

In Isaiah 40-66, Isaiah turns from rebuke to comfort. His prophecies assume Israel captive in Babylon, and he encourages them to put their trust in God and look forward to a restoration to their land (e.g.: Isa. 40).

Sermon Example

A sermon on the Lord's post-denial pursuit of Peter (Jn. 21) was used by a preacher to encourage backsliders not to despair but to return to an all-merciful and all-forgiving God.

17. Examination

When preaching on the internal marks of a true Christian, the preacher will impress on his hearers the need to examine their own hearts to discover whether they have these marks. He will perhaps describe how a true Christian thinks and feels in certain situations and then contrast this with unbelievers.

Scripture Example

In Luke 6:20-26 the Lord describes the blessed identifying marks of the true Christian, and then contrasts this with the characteristics of the unbeliever.

Sermon Example

In a sermon on "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10), a preacher distinguished the joy of the Christian from the joy of the non-Christian by examining the object of each joy, the nature of each joy, the duration of each joy, and the end of each joy. Hearers were encouraged to search their own hearts to see which joy was their "strength."

18. Reconciliation

One important part of sermon application is to reconcile the truth of the preaching passage with modern science, with human experience, or even with the rest of Scripture.

Scripture Example

In Romans 9, the Apostle shows that the doctrine of human responsibility is not incompatible with divine sovereignty (Rom. 9:19-23).

Sermon Example

In a sermon on God's "leaving" of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 32:31), a preacher showed how this was consistent with the promise that God will never leave nor forsake his people (Heb. 13:5). He showed how the leaving was not objective but subjective; not in fact but only in feeling.

19. Anticipation

Many Scriptures were clearly intended by God to anticipate Christ's person and work. They may have a primary reference to Israel and its experiences. However, subsequent Scripture shows that they had a further and higher significance.

Scripture Example

Jonah's "resurrection" through repentance held out hope for Israel that if they repented of their prejudicial nationalism, the nation too could anticipate "resurrection."

Sermon Example

On the authority of Christ Himself (Mat. 12:3), a preacher may use Jonah's "resurrection" as an anticipatory sign of Christ's resurrection, and hence also of believers (1 Cor. 15: 12 ff).

20. Modernization

The Bible addressed the problems of an ancient people in ancient times. The preacher, therefore has to "modernize" when preaching on many passages. He must find out what the people were like and then find out the reason for the message God gave them – what problem was being addressed, etc. Having done that, the preacher can then deduce a timeless principle for modern application.

Scripture Example

In Deuteronomy 25:4, Moses instructed the children of Israel to allow the ox that is treading the corn to eat of the corn as it does so. In 1 Cor. 9:9 and 1 Tim. 5:18 the Apostle took the principle behind the verse – the one who labors should be supported by those his labors benefit – and used it to justify preachers of the Gospel being supported by the givings of the people they minister to.

Sermon Example

"Divers weights are an abomination unto the LORD; and a false balance is not good" (Prov. 20:23). Although few Christians use balances and weights in their daily lives today, a preacher took this text, extracted the principle of fairness and justice in both buying and selling, and on the basis of it exhorted present-day Christians to honesty, fairness, and truthfulness, both in business life and personal life.

Conclusion

Application is the process by which the unchanging principles of God's word are brought into life-changing contact with people who live in an ever-changing world.

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Presentation

Preaching a sermon

Introduction

The behind-the-scenes work is over, and now the sermon is brought out into the light of day. How are we to deliver what we have prepared? What should we bear in mind as we open our mouths to speak in God's name? What will enhance our delivery of God's Word? These are the questions we will address in this chapter.

Preach the Word

1. Purity

No amount of theological substance nor oratorical skills will make up for a preacher's lack of personal holiness. This is true if the pastor obviously does not practice what he preaches. However, it is also true when the inconsistency is not so public – when there is secret and private sin. The spiritually discerning among God's people can detect when the preacher's life does not match his lips. They may not be able to put their finger on it, and they may not be able to put their instincts into words, but they will have an unease, a sense of something not quite right, which will undermine and render impotent much that the preacher says.

Equally though, purity of life will lend a power to a preacher's words that cannot be explained by the substance nor style of his words. There will be an unction from on high, a moral and spiritual power which will impress and influence even the hardest of hearers.

The hearer's apprehension of their minister's character is a most important element in his power of persuasion... The pastor's character speaks more loudly than his tongue.
- Robert L. Dabney



2. Prayer

There is no secret behind powerful preaching – apart from secret prayer. The biggest mistake we can make as preachers is to think that we can learn to preach powerfully from books, or from seminars, or from lectures on preaching. No, for preaching to be powerful it must be preceded by, accompanied with, and followed by prayer.

It is prayer that imparts reality to our sermons. It makes God real to us – His holiness, His power, His love. It makes sin real to us. It makes heaven and hell real to us. It makes eternity real to us. Such reality transforms mere lectures, talks, and Bible studies into living and life-changing sermons. This cannot be learned from books, manufactured, or imitated.

One of the worst feelings in the world is to stand up to preach in the knowledge that you have hardly prayed about the sermon; that you have spent too long on preparing the sermon and not enough on preparing yourself. Few things drain the power from a sermon as much as prayerless preparation and delivery.

Preachers should cultivate the practice of not only praying before and after preaching, but during it. After every main point, or perhaps even after every sub-point, the preacher should briefly pause and silently pray for God to bless what has just been said and to guide in what is yet to be said. If you use notes, then why not insert the word “PRAY” between each point in order to remind you. It will soon become an unconscious and unprompted habit.

3. Personality

“Be yourself.” Sounds simple. But it’s a real struggle. Acting is so easy – and common. It is common for young preachers to act older than their years. It is common for old preachers to act like teenagers. It is common for many preachers to act like a preacher they admire. However, it is part of the preacher’s task to be what God has made them to be. Yes, improve talents. Yes, grow in knowledge. Yes, learn from others. Be the best “you” you can be. But, “Be yourself.”

Don’t rebel against how God has made you and gifted you. God has fitted you and suited you for a particular time, place, and people. To try and be like someone or something else will only hinder your ministry. It is hard for people to accept your words are sincere if they detect that you are not sincere. If you are going to imitate anyone, imitate the Master who, as Clifford Pond said, “Did natural things spiritually and spiritual things naturally.”

The older writers on homiletics argued that preaching should be your natural form of speaking – only somewhat amplified. Shun all affectation and artificiality. Let your voice be natural. Let your gestures be natural. Let your personality, with all its faults, be the vehicle of transporting the words of life to never-dying souls.

4. Posture

The preacher should always remember: “We are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor. 5:20).

On the one hand we are not ambassadors for earthly monarchs, with all the aloofness and detachment that implies. We are ambassadors of Christ, the one who ate and drank with publicans and sinners. Arrogance and pride do not fit ambassadors of the Servant-King

On the other hand we are ambassadors, which implies a responsibility to represent our King accurately, and to communicate the serious message we have been given with dignity, sobriety, solemnity, and fearlessness. We are not in the pulpit to have a casual, hands-in-pocket chat with some friends. Our clothing, posture, demeanor, and expression all preach their own sermon and carry their own message into the hearts of our hearers.

Every tone, and look, and gesture, from the moment he enters the pulpit until he leaves it, the structure of every sentence in his sermon, should reveal a soul in which levity, self-seeking and vanity are annihilated by the absorbing sense of divine things.

- Robert L. Dabney



5. Pronunciation

The preacher has a number of God-given voice tools in his vocal toolbox:

- Volume

There is no point in preaching if we do not speak so as to be heard. The voice should be loud enough to be heard by all throughout the whole sermon. Volume should flow naturally from the subject material and its impact on our own hearts. It should not be manufactured.

- Diction

Many people mistakenly think that volume is the most important factor in making ourselves heard. It's not. It's diction – the clarity with which words are spoken. People will hear even the whispers of someone who clearly separates and articulates all the consonants and syllables of his words without slurring, mumbling, or omission. Equally, without diction, the loudest voice in the world will be just a noise to the hearers.

- Tone

Tone refers not so much to the volume of the note but the pitch of it. The voice has a wide range of tones from low bass notes to high alto notes. In our everyday speech our tone varies with mood and circumstance. This natural variety should be carried into the pulpit in order to avoid unnatural monotony. Normally sermons begin with a low tone/pitch, which usually heightens as the sermon progresses to application.

- Emphasis

When we talk to people, we naturally emphasize what we most want our hearer to listen to. We do this by an increase in volume, diction, or tone for a word or two. This natural “tool” for making one word or phrase stand out from the rest is an important and much underused vocal asset.

- Pace

Another “tool” is pace. Regular and appropriate variations in pace make listening easier. Care should be taken not to speak like a train – and also not to speak like a tortoise.

Wise insertion of pauses allow the truth to sink in and influence the heart before moving on to the next point. Sermons without pauses are like the flat stones which are skimmed across the surface of the water. They make shallow and temporary impressions on the surface as they skate along. Pauses allow the pebbles of truth to sink down and stay down.

- Variety

“Variety” simply refers to the wise and judicious combination of these “tools”. When building a house, the joiner does not always use the hammer. He picks up different tools for different tasks. So, when preaching a sermon, the preacher should wisely vary the use of his vocal tools, moving from loud to quiet, from fast to slow, from didactic to emotional, etc.

Take your model here from Nature. She does not thunder all the year; she gives us sunshine, gentle breezes, a sky checkered with lights and shades, the stiffening gale, and sometimes the rending storm. So no hearer can endure a tempest of rhetoric throughout the discourse.

- Robert L. Dabney

6. Passion

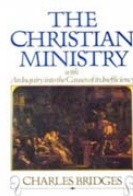
Professor John Murray once said, “To me, preaching without passion, is not preaching at all.” This is because we cannot expect people to be moved and affected by truths which do not seem to move ourselves. If we don’t put our hearts into our sermons we will never put our sermons in our hearers’ hearts. Aim then to be deeply affected by the truths you proclaim.



He must feel his subject. It is as marvelous as it is mournful, that the weighty and thrilling truths of God’s Word lose so much of their force from the little interest the preacher himself feels in his theme....No preacher can sustain the attention of a people unless he feels his subject; nor can he long sustain it, unless he feels it deeply. If he would make others solemn, he himself must be solemn; he must have fellowship with the truths he utters. He must preach as though he were in sight of the cross, and heard the groans of the Mighty Sufferer of Calvary; as though the judgment were set, and the books opened; as though the sentence were just about to be passed which decided the destinies of men; as though he had been looking into the pit of despair; as well as drawing aside the veil, and taking a view of the unutterable glory.

- Gardiner Spring

This is not an argument for artificial emotion. Our emphasis throughout this chapter is on delivering sermons in a “natural” way. When a house is on fire the passer-by does not spend any time thinking about how best to say the words “Fire, fire!” The vocal sentiments and accompanying gestures will come spontaneously and automatically. So it should be with the preacher. If he feels the power of divine truth as he ought, his arms, body, and voice will fit the words without conscious effort.



Preaching is not the work of the lungs, or the mimicry of gesture, or the impulse of uncontrollable feeling; but the spiritual energy of a heart constrained by the love of Christ, and devoted to the care of those immortal souls for whom Christ died

- Charles Bridges



Preaching should be with affectionate earnestness and tenderness. The appearance of coldness and indifference in the preacher to the awful and interesting truths of God’s Word must have a most unhappy effect on the minds of the hearers...A man pleading for the life of another must not appear as one discoursing on an indifferent subject.

- Archibald Alexander

7. People

That brings us on to “people”. The preacher has one eye looking towards God, and another looking towards His congregation. He looks to God and asks “What wilt thou have me to say?” But he also looks at his people and asks, “Are you listening to and understanding what God has given me to say?” As in ordinary conversation, we must maintain maximum eye-contact with our listeners if we want to convince people that we are talking to them. Eye-contact also helps the preacher to maintain sensitivity to the age, education, spiritual condition and responsiveness of the congregation.

Another element to which I attach importance is that the preacher while speaking should in a sense be deriving something from his congregation. There are those present in the congregation who are spiritually-minded people, and filled with the Spirit, and they make their contribution to the occasion. There is always an element of exchange in true preaching.

- M Lloyd-Jones



Thorough preparation and familiarity with the sermon material will free the preacher to engage empathetically with the hearers. The more familiar we are with the road, the more we will be able to take in the surroundings.

We must speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Fenelon said: “I would have every Minister of the Gospel address his audience with the zeal of a friend, with the generous energy of a father, and with the exuberant affection of a mother.”

The sight of his people in the presence of God - their very countenances - their attention or listlessness - their feeding interest or apparent dislike - suggests many points of animated address, which did not occur in the study; excites many visible impressions, which awakens corresponding sympathy and interest in his congregation

- Charles Bridges

8. Plainness

Love for our hearers will motivate us to shun complexity, technical terms, and intricacy, and to speak in a plain, straightforward and simple manner. “So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air” (1 Cor. 14:9).

Be ruthless in pruning your sermons. If you can use a smaller word, do so. If you can use a shorter and less complex sentence, do so. If you want to strike a blow you don't pick up a branch covered in leaves but a stripped down club.

He needs carefully to reject any and every word that does not convey the precise meaning he would express. Indeed, rejection is the chief work in clothing the thoughts of a highly disciplined mind.

- W. G. T. Shedd



The prophets anticipated, and the apostles followed, our Lord's plain and straightforward style. The Old Testament used "tent" Hebrew and the New Testament "market-place" Greek.

In "Truth Applied" Jay Adams relates how Luther initially used churchy academic jargon when he preached to nuns in a convent chapel. But, when he became Pastor of the town church at Wittenberg, he realized that he had to work at making himself understood. He used children for his standard of intelligibility: "I preach to little Hans and Elisabeth." If they could understand, others could too. He refused to play up to the educated in his congregation. "When I preach here at Wittenberg, I descend to the lowest level. I do not look at the doctors or masters, of whom about forty are present, but at the hundred or thousand young people. To them I preach...If the others do not want to listen - the door is open."

May it be said of us as it was of eventually said of Luther, "It was impossible to misunderstand him."

9. Paper

Our earlier emphasis on maintaining maximum eye-contact brings us on to sermon notes. One of the greatest barriers to communication is paper - the paper in the pulpit which contains the preacher's sermon. Often the preacher's eyes are more on this than on their congregation.

The issue is not how much written composition is done in the study or how much written material is brought into the pulpit. The issue is how much dependence upon and preoccupation with written material is manifested in the act of preaching. To state the matter another way, the issue is how much mental and physical attachment is there to one's paper. At the end of the day we are not so much concerned with issues of paper and print, but with the issues of eyes and brains.
- Al Martin



Reading a manuscript to the people can never, with any justice, be termed preaching.... In the delivery of the sermon there can be no exception in favor of the mere reader. How can he whose eyes are fixed upon the paper before him, who performs the mechanical task of reciting the very words inscribed upon it, have the inflections, the emphasis, the look, the gesture, the flexibility, the fire, or oratorical actions? Mere reading, then, should be sternly banished from the pulpit, except in those rare cases in which the didactic purpose supersedes the rhetorical, and exact verbal accuracy is more essential than eloquence
- Robert L. Dabney

Shedd argued that young preachers should from the very beginning of their ministries preach at least one extemporaneous sermon every week. By this he did not mean preaching without study or preparation – quite the opposite. Extemporaneous sermons require more preparation in many ways. What he meant was reducing your sermon to a one-page of skeleton outline, and becoming so familiar with it, that referring to it during the act of preaching is minimized. Then, throughout your ministry, try to reduce the size of the skeleton, and dependence on it, more and more. Let the ideas be pre-arranged but leave exact expression of them to the moment of preaching.

Shedd gives these requirements for extemporaneous preaching:

- A heart glowing and beating with evangelical affections
- A methodical intellect – to organize the sermon material into a clear and logical structure
- The power of amplification – or the ability to expand upon a theme
- A precise and accurate mode of expression
- Patient and persevering practice

To these we might add, prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit for each and all of these requirements.

10. Presence

So much of what we have covered so far will fall into its own place if we cultivate a consciousness of preaching in the presence of God. This consciousness pervaded the Apostle Paul's preaching: "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ (2 Cor. 2:17). We speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying (2 Cor. 12:19).

The best ambassador is the man who best knows the One who has sent him. Indeed, the ambassador who preaches in the knowledge that the Sender is present and with him, cannot but rise to the occasion. The best place, then, to learn how to communicate God's Word is in God's presence. He is the greatest communicator, and time spent with him will make you a more effective ambassador for him.

This consciousness will deal a hammer blow to all theatrics, hypocrisy, etc. It will cultivate dignity and seriousness. We are the ministers of a great king, and are entrusted with an important embassy.

The most pernicious and debasing evil of all is, a converting our sacred office into a medium for setting forth our own excellence – prostituting the glories of the cross for the indulgence of our own pride, drawing a veil over the glories of our adorable Master and committing a robbery against him, even in the professed business to exalt him. This is to lose sight of the great end of the Ministry—commending ourselves, instead of our Master, to the regard of our people...Our business is to make men think, not of our eloquence, but of their own souls; to attend, not to our fine language, but to their own everlasting interest. Our duty is...not to stroke the ear, but to strike the heart.

- Charles Bridges

Conclusion

"Lo, I am with you" is both a comfort and a challenge. God is listening, watching, and taking notes. And, one day, He will call to account.

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