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Preaching
by
G. Campbell Morgan

FOREWORD

IF there is any excuse for this book it is that it is an attempt to answer a question that I have been asked, certainly hundreds of times during the course of my work of preaching. The question has taken many forms, but it is essentially the same. It is an enquiry concerning methods of preparation in expository preaching. Individual preachers and groups of preachers have asked me to tell them how I work. I have always felt it difficult to reply. During the three years in which I was President of Cheshunt **College**, Cambridge, I attempted to talk to the students on the subject. The notes of what I then said are embodied in these Lectures. In 1925 I gave them to the students of the Biblical Seminary in New York. They then appeared in condensed

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form in the *Biblical Review*. I have now simply taken these reprints, and recast them.

In so far as “Rules” are found here, they may be largely ignored, for as I have said in the course of these studies no man can make “Rules” for another. But I hold that the Principles set forth are of fundamental importance and vital value in preaching.

In sending the book forth I hope it may be found of some help to those believing in the supreme place of preaching, are desirous of some guidance in the sacred work.

G. CAMPBELL MORGAN.

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I

THE ESSENTIALS OF A SERMON

^{1N} Ephesians 4:8-12, verses 9 and ¹⁰ constitute a parenthesis. These verses are important, but if for the moment we leave them out, we gain a continuity of thought and statement.

“Wherefore He saith,
When He ascended on high, He led
captivity captive,
And gave gifts unto men. ... And
He gave some to be apostles” (the
words ‘to be’ are quite unnecessary;
though put in by the translators to
make good sense they do not make
good sense); “and some, prophets;
and some, evangelists; and some,

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pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ.”

These gifts are not for the work of ministering, but for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering. He gave them in order that those possessing them might perfect the saints unto the work of the ministry. That work can only be fulfilled by all the saints.

In Romans 10: 12-15, we read:

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek: for the same Lord is Lord of all, and is rich unto all that call upon Him: for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him Whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they

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preach, except they be sent ? even as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things !

The reading of these passages introduces us to an atmosphere. Behind the subject of preaching is that of the specific Christian ministry, constituted by the gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon some within the Church. The whole question of the ministry is involved in that of preaching. Men or women called into this special ministry of preaching are so called by the bestowment of a gift, whatever the gift may be. They should not be confused. I think we are making a great mistake in much of our thinking and training when we imagine that every Christian minister ought to be somewhat of a prophet, somewhat of an evangelist, and somewhat of a pastor and teacher. I believe that to-day in the Christian Church these gifts are

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entirely distinct. But preaching is the vocation of all of them. The apostle, the prophet, the evangelist, and the pastor and teacher are called to preach. I am now concerned with preaching.

The supreme work of the Christian minister is the work of preaching. This is a day in which one of our greatest perils is that of doing a thousand little things to the neglect of the one thing, which is preaching.

I commend the gathering together of all the words in the New Testament-and of course I mean the Greek New Testament -that refer to the exercise of speech for the impartation of truth. We find eight or ten different Greek words, every one indicating some phase of this work of preaching. There are two however which are supreme. In our translations they are not always made distinct. All the rest are incidental, though valuable, *Euaggelizo*

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and *kerusso* are the words, which indicate the supreme phases of our preaching, and show us the whole New Testament ideal thereof.

Euaggelizo means to preach the Gospel. The one word is translated by our phrase, "preach the Gospel." Literally it means the proclamation of good news. It is the word from which we derive our words "evangel," "evangelist," and "evangelistic," which come directly by transliteration, rather than by translation, from the Greek word.

If preaching is proclaiming good news, that suggests two things; the need of man, and the grace of God. Those two things are postulated by the very word that is used to describe preaching from the New Testament standpoint. Proclamation of the good news to men will suggest that men are needing good news. Human need is the background. All the race's sin

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and sorrow and perplexity are implied. Then, of course, it **recognises** the whole fact of grace, that stupendous fact of Divine revelation, the grace of God. Preaching as proclaiming good news postulates human need and Divine grace. Whenever we preach, we stand between those two things, between human need and Divine grace. We are the messengers of that grace to that need.

The other word, *kerusso*, is a very interesting term, meaning really a proclamation from a throne. The word is spoken as being delivered by a messenger on behalf of a ruler. Consequently in the use of the word we have two ideas again to note: the authorising Throne, and therefore the consequent claim that the messenger is called upon to make.

Merge these two things very briefly. What is preaching? It has a hundred particulars and varieties and intonations.

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But here is the unifying thought. Preaching is the declaration of the grace of God to human need on the authority of the Throne of God; and it demands on the part of those who hear that they show obedience to the thing declared.

I once heard a man at a ministerial conference say: "In the old days preaching was a conflict between the preacher and the crowd. He was in the presence of the crowd to compel the crowd to submission. That day has gone. The preacher's vocation has changed." I wonder ! I think, if preaching has failed, or if it is failing, that is why.

The preacher should never address a crowd without remembering that his ultimate citadel is the citadel of the human will. He may travel along the line of the emotions, but he is after the will. He may approach along the line

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of the intellect, but he is after the will. When preaching becomes merely discussion in the realm of the intellect, or -forgive my use of the word-fooling in the realm of the emotions, and when preaching ends in the intellectual or emotional, it fails. It is successful only when it is able to storm the will, under the will of God. The preacher comes with good news; but he does not come with something to be trifled with. His message has an insistent demand, because he comes from a King.

That is our principal work in the Christian ministry. The apostles said; “We will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the service (or ministry) of the Word” (Acts 6 :4). That was the origin of the order of the New Testament deacons. Whatever the deacons may be now, that tells what they were then. In the New Testament they were men full **of faith**

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and the Holy Spirit. Mark the principle of appointing Church officers in the first Churches. Their business was to serve tables, a great ministry, in order that ministers of the Word might be free to serve the Word, and to give themselves to prayer in preparation.

I am deeply conscious of the baldness of human speech, but the bigness of the work if we are to be preachers will at once be **recognised**. Preaching is a great thing. Bishop Frazer said some few years ago-and I think it is more true to-day than it was then : "This age wants, demands, and is prepared to receive, not the priest, but the prophet."

We are facing to-day the biggest hour the world has ever known for preaching. The miseries of theological controversy that are blighting our age cannot satisfy. The mass of men are waiting for preaching of the New Testament kind, with a great

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message of grace to meet human need, delivered by men who realise that they represent a Throne, and have the right to claim submission to it.

I want to indicate now the essentials of a sermon, and the essentials of sermonizing. These essentials are Truth, Clarity, Passion.

I am speaking out of my experience. I never heard a lecture on homiletics in my life. I have given a good many. One fine preparation for lecturing on homiletics is never to have heard anybody else do it! I have tried to examine in the New Testament, and in the Old Testament, the great preaching of both the prophets of the Old and the apostles and evangelists of the New. And if I am asked to condense into words the essentials of a sermon, I do it with these three; Truth, Clarity, Passion.

I use this word *Truth* now in one way.

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In writing to Timothy, Paul charged him in that final letter, so poignant and yet so wonderful, "Preach the Word." The verb means to proclaim as a herald, with authority. His message was to be the Word. Take the phrase, "the word," and examine its use in the New Testament. There are some places where it is spelled with a capital W, and elsewhere it is spelled without a capital W. We ask : Why is it spelled with a capital W here, and without a capital W there?

We read in John, in that matchless Prologue :

"In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and the
Word was God."

And then, skipping the parenthesis:

"And the Word became flesh."

We find a capital W in every case.

Then we turn to the Gospel of Luke,

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and read that great Preface, so important to all the historical documents in our Bible, and he speaks of those who were “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.” Here we find a small w. Why the difference? If I am asked, Why have the translators rendered it with a small w here, instead of a capital? my answer is, I do not know. There is no reason why. We have the definite article in both places. “The word” is Luke’s last name for the Son of man. Of course a preface is always written last. He wrote this preface after the Gospel was written, to introduce it to his friend Theophilus, and in it he calls Jesus “the Word.”

What does this word mean? Bear with me if I condense by quoting from one of my books :

“The word Logos is used in the New Testament in two ways, the suggestiveness of each never being wholly absent

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from the other. Its first and perhaps simplest meaning is that of speech and language, the expression of truth for the understanding of others. Its second and perhaps deeper meaning is that of the absolute truth itself. As Thayer indicates, in that sense the Greek word Logos is the exact equivalent of the Latin word **Ratio**, from which we obtain our words **rational** and reason. Note the significance of that. Thus Logos is speech, and the truth spoken, or reason, and the explanation of its expression. The interrelation of ideas in their use is that the Word incarnate was the truth of God, but being the speech of God, was the expression of eternal truth. The Word and reason must express the idea in a speech which is logical and true. It is necessary, in the study of the New Testament, carefully to discriminate by reference to the context as to which sense

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is intended when this word is used. Sometimes it refers to speech as a statement made, sometimes to the essential truth out of which the statement came, sometimes both ideas are most evidently present in the use of the word.”

It will be granted that preachers are to preach the Word. You say that means the Bible. Does it? Yes. Is that all? No. Yes, it is all there. But you want more than that, more than all. The Word is truth as expressed or revealed. The Word is never something that I have found out by the activity of my own intellectual life. The Word is something which my intellectual life apprehends, because it has been expressed. If we take the **119th** Psalm and study it **through**—that great psalm concerning the Word of God—we are not to imagine that it is referring only to the **Torah** or Law, the **Nebiim** or Prophets, the *Kethubim* or

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Writings. It has in view the truth, the essential truth, and the truth as God makes it known. All that is focussed in Christ for us as preachers; and Christ is revealed to us through this literature.

But it may be asked: Is there not an experience of Christ? There is, but the literature tests the experience. That was a tremendous description that Justin Martyr gave when, speaking of the Word of God he referred to “the spermatic Word.” Seed, that is to say, the truth in germ and norm. That is what we have in the Christ, and which we find in our Bible -germ and norm.

Apply that to the Bible; what then have we? Truth in germ, which needs apprehension, development, application. That is the work of the preacher. But we also have it in norm. This means that we are to test our own thinking by it finally, and not it by our own thinking.

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Consequently the preacher is to be held by the Word, truth, as it is in God, and as God has made it known. How has He made it known? We are assuming without any argument that God has made it known finally in His Son, and that in the literature, the Biblical literature, we have the full record of preparation, of historic fact, of initial interpretation. Follow the line of that. Preparation, all the Old Testament. Historic fact, the four Gospel narratives. Initial interpretation, all the twenty-one letters. There we have all the literature around this one great Person, Who is in that sense for us the Word.

And that is what we have to preach. God's revelation, the truth, as it has been expressed. We must enter upon the Christian ministry on the assumption that God has expressed Himself in His Son, and that the Bible is the literature

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of that self-expression. The minute we lose our Bible in that regard, we have lost Christ as the final revelation. I don't want to be controversial, but you will find it is always so. Let me speak with profound respect of the men who have suffered this **loss**. Here is a man who for some reason refuses the authority of his Bible, but says he will stand by Christ, What Christ ?

There is a fashion to-day among some preachers, to talk and preach about the approach to Jesus. We are being told that we must go back and approach Him as His early disciples did. Did we ever realise the utter fallacy of that position? Those men apprehended Him in the days of His limitation, when He Himself had to say:

“I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire, if it is already kindled? But I have a baptism to be

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baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! ”

(Luke 12:49,50).

Ponder the significance of **that**—Christ’s great soliloquy in this chapter in Luke in which He expressed His difficulty, that He could not make Himself known, could not fulfil His mission. He was straitened. The teaching of Christ is not the final fact about Christ, and His Person is not the final fact about Christ. We find that fact in Jesus crucified, risen, and ascended. We must approach Christ thus, and we must cling to that Christ. That is the Word of God in all its fullness.

Every sermon, then, is a message out of that sum totality of truth. Any sermon that fails to have some interpretation of that holy truth is a failure. That totality is not a small thing. In Him are summed up all things. In Him dwells the fullness,

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the *pleroma*, of the Godhead corporeally. The man who begins to preach Christ as the Divine revelation, interpreted to him through the literature, is beginning a thing that will never end. He can never be at the end of his message, because his message is the infinite and full and eternal truth. Preaching **is** the declaration of truth, as truth has been revealed to men by God, in Christ.

Take the word "mystery" as we find it in the New Testament. What do we mean by a mystery? Ordinarily it means something that we cannot understand. The Greek philosopher meant by it something that can be made known only to the initiated, and which, being made known, cannot be told to any other than those initiated. That is not the meaning of "mystery" in the New Testament. There, a mystery is something which human intellect can apprehend when it

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is revealed. "Great is the mystery of godliness." Paul does not mean godliness is something we cannot understand. The deep heart and meaning of godliness is beyond the discovery of the human intellect; it is something revealed. Put "manifest" over against "mystery." Being manifested, it can be apprehended.

Here is our richness, if we are going to preach. The preacher is a steward of the mysteries of God, not things that cannot be apprehended, but things that human intellect cannot discover, which God has revealed. The New Testament preacher is always moving in the realm of the supernatural. It is absurd for a man to say that he rules out the supernatural when he cuts out the little things he calls miracles-1 mean little by comparison. All the miracles of Jesus, what men call miracles, are very secondary and unimportant compared with what He

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said, and finally insignificant by the side of Himself and His mighty Word. The words of Jesus are far more supernatural than the things He did, if by miracle we mean some activity in the realm of the material things. We have to deal with the supernatural. All preachers must. Preachers have been told that they have been too other-worldly. When we cease to be other-worldly we lose our ability to touch this world with any healing and uplifting power. We move in the realm of truth revealed, coming to men from God.

That forces us to distinguish. Preaching is not the proclamation of a theory, or the discussion of a doubt. A man has a perfect right to proclaim a theory of any sort, or to discuss his doubts. But that is not preaching. "Give me the benefit of your convictions, if you have any. Keep your doubts to yourself; I

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have enough of my own," said Goethe. We are never preaching when we are hazarding speculations. Of course we do so. We are bound to speculate sometimes. I sometimes say: "I am speculating; stop taking notes." Speculation is not preaching. Neither is the declaration of negations preaching. Preaching is the proclamation of the Word, the truth as the truth has been revealed.

Our deposit is the sum totality of the truth. We are holding a bigger thing than we know. If we should live and preach for half a century or a century, we should never be able to exhaust the thing that is ours as a deposit. Paul wrote :

"I know Whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

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I am not so sure that this is correct translation. It is an attempt to interpret. It is literally translated, "to guard my deposit." Our translators have always made it mean something Paul had deposited with Him. I think it means rather that which He had deposited with Paul, the thing for which he was responsible; this whole truth, this Word of God, focussed, crystallised in a Person, and interpreted by a literature.

That is our business as preachers. "Oh, but the preacher must catch the spirit of the *age*." God forgive him if he does. Our business is never to catch, but by eternal truth to correct the spirit of the age. This is not narrow. Nothing can happen to-day to which the truth of God has not something to say. Our preaching will touch life at every point. We do not go to discuss a situation, but to deliver a message. The preacher must

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for evermore stand in the presence of man and conditions, thinking in his own soul, if the formula is not often upon his lips, "Thus saith the Lord." Here is the truth, the truth that men never have been able to discover by all the exercise, honest and sincere and persistent, of their intellectual activity, but the truth that God has spoken, revealed, made known. (See Hebrews 1:1-4.) He has spoken to us *in* a Son. The great fact is God, God speaking, making Himself known in the past in divers portions and by divers manners, at last in a Person. Who gathered up the portions and uttered them in one inclusive final revelation. When we enter the Christian ministry and become preachers, it is that whole body of truth for which we are responsible.

By truth I mean the Word, in all the fullness of the suggestiveness of that

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expression. May I say again that by that I mean the revelation, God's Self-revelation of Himself, centrally, supremely, finally in His Son. But, of course, also in the literature that is in the Bible. Preaching is declaring the truth of God as it bears upon every local situation. "Preach the Word."

As I said, every sermon is an interpretation, or should be an interpretation, of some part of that great whole of truth. Every sermon is characterised by two things—originality and authority.

I am going to make a long quotation. Some thirty-five or more years ago I wrote this out for myself, and I have kept it by me, and very often have read it. It is on *originality*. Men were constantly using that term "original," insisting that the preacher must be original. We have heard it said in criticism of a

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sermon, "It was very good, but it was not original." We should realise what originality really is, therefore I give this somewhat lengthy quotation from Shedd :

"Originality is a term often employed, rarely defined, and very often misunderstood. It is frequently supposed to be equivalent to the creation of truth. An original mind, it is vulgarly imagined, is one that gives expression to ideas and truths that were never heard of **before**,— ideas and truths of which the human mind never had even an intimation or presentiment, and which come into it by a mortal leap, abrupt and startling, without antecedents and without premonitions. But no such originality as this is possible to a finite intelligence. Such aboriginality as this is the prerogative of the Creator alone, and the results of it are a **revelation**, in the technical and strict sense of the term. Only God can

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create *de nihilo*, and only God can make a communication of truth that is absolutely new. Originality in man is always relative, and never absolute. Select, for illustration, an original thinker within the province of philosophy,-select the contemplative, the profound, the ever fresh and living Plato. Thoughtfully peruse his weighty and his musical periods, and ask yourself whether all this wisdom is the sheer make of his intellectual energy, or whether it is not rather an emanation and efflux from a mental *constitution* which is as much yours as his. He did not absolutely originate these first truths of ethics, these necessary forms of logic, these fixed principles of physics. They were inlaid in his rational structure by a higher author, and by an absolute authorship ; and his originality consists solely in their exegesis and interpretation. And this is the reason that,

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on listening to his words, we do not seem to be hearing tones that are wholly unknown and wholly unheard of. We find an answering voice to them in our mental and moral constitution. In no contemptuous, but in a reverential and firm tone, every thinking person, even in the presence of the great thinkers of the race, may employ the language of Job, in reference to self-evident truths and propositions :

‘Lo, mine eye hath seen all this, mine ear hath heard and understood it. What ye know, the same do I know also; I am not inferior unto you.’ ”

This quotation from Job is wonderfully apt at this point. Every one who listens to us when we are giving him something original is saying that thing.

“And these great thinkers themselves are the first to acknowledge this. . . .

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Originality, then, within the sphere of a creature, and in reference to a finite intelligence, consists in the power of interpretation. In its last analysis it is **exegesis**, -the pure, genial, and accurate exposition of an idea or a truth already existing, already communicated, already possessed. ... There has been no creation, but only a development; no absolute authorship, but only an explication. And yet how fresh and original has been the mental process! The same substantially in Plato and in the thousands of his scholars; and yet in every single instance there has been all the enthusiasm, all the stimulation, all the ebullient flow of life and feeling that attends the discovery of a new continent or a new star.

'Then feels he like some watcher of the
skies
When a new planet swims into his ken ;

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Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle
eyes

He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise,
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.'

“Originality in man, then, is not the power of making a communication of truth, but of apprehending one. Two great communications have been made to him,-the one in the book of nature, and the other in the book of revelation. If the truth has been conveyed through the mental and moral structure, if it has been wrought by the creative hand into the fabric of human nature, then he is the most original thinker who is most successful in reading it just as it reads, and expounding it just as it stands. If the truth has been communicated by miracle, by incarnation, and by the Holy Ghost; if it has been imparted by special inspiration, and lies before him an objec-

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tive and written revelation; then he is the original thinker who is most successful in its interpretation,-who is most accurate in analysing its living elements, and is most genial and cordial in receiving them into his own mental and moral being.”¹

This quotation is one of the statements that have profoundly influenced my life, my working, and my preaching. We see where that takes the question of originality. If indeed, our deposit as preachers is that sum total of truth, contained in the Word, which we face in order to interpret, in the written Word, we shall always be original. Not that we are inventing new truths, or even discovering them, but that we are interpreting the sum total of truth by every Christian sermon that has in it the originality of the apprehension of the

¹Homiletics *and Pastoral Theology*, William G. T. Shedd, p. 7ff.

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meaning of revealed truth, and of giving it to others that they may apprehend it. That originality is a note of real preaching. A man who is merely indulging in speculation, along the ways of his **own** thinking, is never original. Originality in preaching consists in the interpretation of revelation. Revelation is so great and mighty, that if we are dealing with that, and always leading into it, in every message, there is always something original in our preaching.

A sermon should be characterised also by authority. In the seventh chapter of Matthew there is a little paragraph which Matthew wrote with reference to the effect produced upon the multitude by what we call the Sermon on the Mount -rather the great ethical manifesto of the King-concerning the effect upon the multitude :

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“And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at His teaching; for He taught them as One having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7 : 28, 29).

Has it ever occurred to us that the remarkable thing is not the declaration that He spake as One having authority, though that is the main thing? What arrests us ?

“ The multitudes were astonished at His teaching; for He taught them as One having authority, and not as *their scribes.* ”

The arresting thing in that statement is the little phrase which makes that distinction or contrast, I could read it over and over again, and agree. Of course, when He spake He had authority. But the thing that arrested me long ago and still holds me is the contrast suggested, “not as their scribes.”

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The scribes were the authoritative teachers. An order of scribes was not arranged for in the Mosaic economy. They came with Ezra. When Ezra erected that **pulpit** of wood, and held what we can probably call the first Bible conference on record, he “read the law, and gave the sense.” This means first that he was translating it from Hebrew into the language of the captivity; but it means more. He interpreted and applied it. So arose the order of scribes. Their work was that of moral interpretation. They were the authoritative teachers, whom our Lord **recognised**. In Matthew 23 He said:

“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe “-

but don’t do as they do. That is a startling thing. While not appointed in

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the Mosaic economy at the beginning, their authority was recognised, and our Lord also acknowledged it. They surely spoke with authority. And yet Matthew says: “He spoke as One having authority but not as the scribes.”

The authority detected in the teaching of Jesus was not of the nature of the authority detected in the teachings of the scribes. What was the difference? The authority of the scribes consisted in their recognised position, in the fact that they were chosen to be the interpreters of the Law of Moses. It was the authority of the office conferred and exercised. What was the difference? He spoke as One having authority, but not that way. I do not think this authority was to be found in His demeanour, in His attitude, in His look, though I don't think, if we had seen our Lord in the days of His flesh and listened to Him, we would

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have missed the dignity and wonder of His personality. His authority was rather the authority of the thing He said, as it found them and found in them an answer of acquiescence.

Take the Sermon on the Mount. I am referring to it generally, of course. Is it not arresting, at least that we do not find men quarrelling with that to-day? I mean those that we differ from, who to our thinking emasculate the Person of Christ and deny what we call the supernatural, the miraculous, still hold the Sermon on the Mount, because they cannot quarrel with it. Human consciousness never quarrels with it.

There is only one criticism of the ethical ideals of the Sermon on the Mount that is justified, at least so far as I know. What is it? Take that Sermon on the Mount and read it through. Study it. See what it has to say about individual life,

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about social relationships, knowing the great passion of the ultimate glory of the Kingdom of God that flames and flashes through its ideals. Where do men quarrel with it, not as Christians, but as human beings? At what point can they object? There is only one justifiable criticism, and that does not deny its beauty or its glory. It *is* that it *is* not practicable. I mean that no unregenerate man can live by the Sermon on the Mount. I am told to preach it to the world. I decline to do it, because men cannot obey it. It must be held up as a revelation of God's ideal, but no man can obey it unless he is born again.

Remember that our Lord did not give the Sermon on the Mount to the outside world. He gave it to His disciples. The outside world heard it. They gathered about. But He was giving the Law of the Kingdom to those who were submitted to the King. The multitudes merely

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gathered and listened. We are to insist upon that standard of life, but to do that apart from the preaching of the Evangel, which brings something dynamic, is merely to reveal man's impotence. You cannot run human life on the basis of the Sermon on the Mount, until people are born again. It is too high, too severe.

The sermon which is a true interpretation of any part of that sum totality of truth which we have in the Word is original, because it is a true interpretation of that which is the revelation, and to us carries the conviction of truth, which is authority. That is where the authority of the preacher lies; not in a demeanour, not even in formulated creeds that are behind him, though I do not speak disrespectfully of them, but in the thing he says. If his sermon is an exposition, interpretation, and application of some part of truth, it always carries authority.

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It is very remarkable that the Old Testament prophets made their occasional appeal, not merely to the people to whom they talked, but to a wider world, for confirmation. In Jeremiah we find a point where he used a common word in a most remarkable way. He said, "You have refused your God, therefore your God will refuse you." And again, "Men will call you refuse silver, because Jehovah hath refused you" (Jer. 6: 30). It was a play on words. Jeremiah told those people that men outside the nation would agree with God's action in the nation. They would account the people refuse, who had refused God, and who were refused of God. He was appealing to an underlying human consciousness.

The preacher always has that to appeal to. I am not going to be involved in an argument concerning original sin. I believe in it; I have seen so much of it in

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others, and found so much more of it in myself. But God has never left Himself without witness. The libertine-any man-who listens to your sermon, if it is a Biblical denunciation of sin, the out-flashing of what the Word of God has to say about sin, recognises the truth. It has authority. We come away from the Word to the disputes of men, and they will not believe us, even though Sir Oliver Lodge is the preacher. He told us no intelligent man worries about sin or disputes about sin. A more unscientific thing was never said by a scientist. Not that men call it sin ; they call it continuous abnormality, and all sorts of things, but they know the fact. The message of the Word on the subject always reaches that underlying consciousness. I am not saying that they will obey. That is not our business. We are to preach the truth with that exegesis which means a true exposi-

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tion of the truth itself, and that always has the note of authority.

Again every sermon should have clarity. Of course I mean clarity of statement in every way. Martin Luther said: "A preacher ought so to preach, that when the sermon is ended, the congregation shall disperse saying, 'The preacher said this.'"

The whole point, as I understand it is, that the sermon should have a message that is perfectly clear in its statement of something that grips the congregation, so that they would go away saying, "The preacher said this." Clarity. In preaching everything should be subservient to this.

Here another thing to be remembered is, that the making plain does not depend upon us finally, but upon the Holy Spirit. The preaching of the Word must be in the demonstration and power of the Holy

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Spirit, not power only, but demonstration, the making plain. When the Christian preacher, preaching out of His Word, is true to His will, he may know that in co-operation with him-1 use the word reverently, but reasonably-is the Holy Spirit making the Word plain. But no man has any right to depend wholly upon that. In the preparation and delivery of a sermon we must be very careful that we make our statement such as can be apprehended by those who are listening. That applies to diction, illustrations, and manner of delivery. We preach in order that people may apprehend.

Our diction comes under that heading. It is told of Robert Hall, that great English preacher of a couple of generations ago—than whom we never had in some senses, a greater preacher, a man who preached for forty years, never out of physical pain—that he had a manuscript of his own sent

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in for correction, and he stumbled over the word “felicity.” He said: “Was I fool enough to use that word? Strike it out, and put in ‘happiness.’”

If twenty people in the congregation don’t know what it means, is it not better to strike it out, and put in “happiness ?”

I remember when a little book of mine called *Life* Problems was published, many years ago, it was very severely reviewed by a great journal. The reviewer said: “This man evidently has no use for language other than that of making people know what he wants to say.” He went on to say that there were no flowers of speech, no beauties of expression. I pasted it in a book, and I said, “The Lord help me to keep right there.” I urge that as something of importance in all preaching.

Clarity affects the whole question of illustrations. That is another big side issue, but I would give to every young

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preacher a simple formula for his illustrations. Let your illustrations be such as shine into your sermon, and not illustrations that you drag in. You have heard men preach, and tell a story. The story has really no vital relationship with their message. They put it in, and it relieves the congregation, making them smile at the moment, perhaps, but it has no relation to the sermon. One of the most skilful in this matter that I have known was John Henry Jowett. W. L. Watkinson was another. Dr. Jowett's illustrations always shone into his main theme. You never went away with the illustration as the supreme thing; it was there illuminating. I remember hearing him in Birmingham, when he said : "Human and Divine divisions of humanity are radically different. Divine divisions are perpendicular, human divisions are horizontal."

Well, there we were. He picked up his

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hymn book, held it upright, and said :“I will show you what I mean. That is perpendicular division to the right, to the left ; that is Divine.”

Then holding it flat: “**T**his is horizontal-upper, middle, lower classes; that is human.”

That is great illustration.

With the portion of truth that is constituting the sermon, with the great originality that is always in an inescapable truth, winged with its own authority, our business is in some way to make that truth have clarity in our diction, in our illustration, and of course in our manner.

Finally there is a third essential, Passion. I want to say a word about this quite briefly. In the true sermon there must always be passion. But the passion must be something that is created by no

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conscious effort. It must come out of what we are declaring, and out of our consciousness of it. Half the sermons to-day—may I be forgiven if I am **cruel**—are failing because they lack the note of passion. There is a tale told of that great English actor, Macready. An eminent preacher once said to him:

“I wish you would explain something to me.”

“Well, what is it? I don’t know that I can explain anything to a preacher.”

“What is the reason for the difference between you and me? You are appearing before crowds night after night with fiction, and the crowds come wherever you go. I am preaching the essential and unchangeable truth, and I am not getting any crowd at all.”

Macready’s answer was this: “This is quite simple. I can tell you the difference between us. I present my fiction as though

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it were truth; you present your truth as though it were fiction.”

I leave that story right at this point. Of course the question comes, whether a man can preach these things without passion if they are truth to him. I don't know; I must not sit in judgment on other men. But our theme as preachers of the Word has to do with the glory of life-with the tragedy of sin, and its remedy, I cannot see how anyone can really handle these things until he is handled by them. A man was formerly said to “handle his text.” If he handles his text he cannot preach at all. But when his text handles him, when it grips and masters and possesses him, and in experience he is responsive to the thing he is declaring, having conviction of the supremacy of truth and experience of the power of truth, I think that must create passion.

I am not arguing for mere excitement.

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Painted fire never burns, and an imitated enthusiasm is the most empty thing that can possibly exist in a preacher. Given the preacher with a message from the whole Bible, seeing its bearing on life at any point, I cannot personally understand that man not being swept sometimes right out of himself by the fire and the force and the fervour of his work.

Truth, clarity, passion-I believe that in the real sermon these three things are always found.

Truth will always, in my view, make its impression of authority upon the soul, but we cannot get it over to the soul save as it comes through our own personality, not merely as an intellectual concept, but as a thing that is moving us. I don't think any preacher ever can lift his hearers above the level of his own experience. That is a great conviction with me. We cannot take

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our people, even if we state truth accurately, if it is only an intellectual statement, and make them feel its force. That is the difference between the press and the pulpit. Read a book, and we have the truth, perhaps, but in preaching you have the truth plus the man, not plus as though we can separate them, but the truth incarnate expressing itself to me through man.

Truth and life travel together in preaching. He Who said, "I am the truth," also said, "I am the life." In Him we have the eternal **illustration** of the power of truth in life. In a measure that has to be reproduced in all who are really preaching. Of course, it is a very different thing from lecturing, or discussing things with the congregation. That does not concern us. Our business is uttering the Word of God.

II THE TEXT

BY "TEXT " we mean the paragraph, the verse, or part of a verse, which is the basis of a sermon. Preaching from texts has become an established custom in the Christian Church in all denominations. Whether in the Greek Church or the Roman Church, or the Churches of Protestantism, preachers take texts. It seems to be one of those decisions of the universal Church, which demonstrate the guidance of the Spirit of God far more than any formulas or decrees ever have done or can do. This method has come out of the common feeling and consciousness of the Christian Church and the men who have ministered in it.

The word itself, from the Latin *textum*, means something that is woven. We find

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it in the word texture, referring to a garment. Quoting from Dr. Shedd: "A text is a passage of inspiration, which is woven primarily into the web of Holy Writ, and secondarily, into the web of a discourse."

I like that definition. A text is primarily woven into the web of Holy Writ. That is where we find it. It is taken from there, and then it is woven into the web of the sermon. So the question of the text is of supreme importance when we are talking about sermonising.

Let us briefly take up three lines; first the Reason for the text; second, the Choice of the text ; third, the Treatment of the text.

Now as to the ***Reason for the text.*** Dr. Benjamin Jowett of Oxford, the old Master of **Balliol**, declared that it was his habit to write his sermons, and then choose a text as a peg on which to hang them. I am quite free to say, without any further

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reference, that the study of his sermons will reveal the accuracy of his statement, and show the peril of the method, from the standpoint of the Christian prophet.

Why have a text? Three reasons; first, the authority that is in the text as being a part of the Word of God; second, the definiteness which it must give, when properly dealt with, to the Christian message; and finally, the maintenance of variety.

First, the authority of the Word of God. The Christian preacher is a messenger. His sermon must be a message. Let us always remember that to proclaim our personal convictions may not be to deliver a message from God, and therefore, in the last analysis, is not preaching at all, except as our convictions are based upon the Word of God. There may be excellent work done in lecturing and speaking, which yet falls short of preaching. Such

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proclamation may not be the delivery of a message from God. I know men who are convinced of the absolute Deity of our Lord, without any qualification, but they do not believe He was born of a Virgin. If they proclaim that from the pulpit, that is the proclamation of their conviction, but that is not preaching the Word. Preaching the Word must be preaching that He was born of a Virgin. You may debate that question philosophically and scientifically, but that is not preaching. No man can be preaching the Word, unless he is delivering the Divine message. I am assuming the authority of the Bible. Preaching is nothing else than bringing God's message, as it is found in the Oracles Divine. When the sermon has a text which is authoritative, all the rest is to be tested by it.

That is the value of the text. I read a text to my congregation. That is the message.

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That is the one thing that is absolutely and finally authoritative. My sermon has no authority in it at all, except as an interpretation or an exposition or an illustration of the truth which is in the text. The text is everything. That is the point of authority.

Then it is not only the fact of having a point of authority; it is also so, that a text gives definiteness to the message. Limitation creates power. The fact that we are only taking that paragraph, verse, statement, perhaps phrase, gives this limitation. In preaching there is a tendency to generalisation and discursiveness. That is checked when a sermon is really true to its text. You have authority, because the text is the Word of God. You have definiteness because you are bound to keep within the confines of what that text is saying. The text, of course, may say much in its implications and applications; but it defines the theme.

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There was a man who gave out his text and said: "That is my text. I am now going to preach. Maybe we'll meet again, the text and I, and maybe not."

He was not going to preach at all ; he was just going to talk.

Preaching from texts also maintains variety. Themes will run out sooner or later, but the Bible never. It affords expositions and illustrations and enforcements, and the procession of a real Biblical ministry is always maintained. If we think of any minister who has maintained his virility and his freshness through long years, especially at one centre, I think I am right in saying that his ministry has been Biblical. The freshness of the Bible is eternal.

What then, about *the Choice of the text?* How are we to choose? In many ways this is the most important part of our discus-

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sion. Every preacher comes up against that. Twice next Sunday, twice next Sunday, twice next Sunday-how many of us have gone through that? The question of the choice of texts is a critical one, and attention should be given to it at once and continuously. How is a man to choose texts? Texts are sometimes chosen out of our regular reading, sometimes in order to deal with some special need, sometimes in order to definite doctrinal teachings, and sometimes because of their revelation of great things.

Out of regular reading. From my own experience I may say that in the regular reading of the Bible devotionally, there will constantly be discovered some one text, some one statement, some one verse, which grips. When such is the case let us never hurry on. It is good to stop and put it down. Postpone further reading, until we have at least said to ourself, Why did

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that arrest me; what is there in that which pulled me up? Make a note of it, If we form the habit of constantly doing that in our devotional reading we shall find these things that thus seemed to leap out at us.

“When found, make note of “-Captain Cuttle’s advice is very excellent. If possible we should make an outline of the scheme of thought suggested. Sometimes when we want a text, we shall run over these outlines, and perhaps not see a thing in ninety-nine per cent. of them. In one per cent. we shall, and that one per cent. is worthwhile.

Sometimes a text will bring a ready-made sermon. That is not often the case, but it is so now and then. It is not merely a message, but a whole scheme. This happened to me once many years ago. It was during my earlier ministry in London. I had my sermon prepared for Sunday morning. Before starting for the

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service I was reading in my study Peter's first letter. Often before preaching I read through some book in the Bible that has nothing to do with what I am preaching on. I struck against the ninth verse of the second chapter :

“Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies (praises) of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.”

The whole thing leaped at me. I looked at it, and looked at it, and then got up, went to the Church, went through the first part of the service, read the text, and preached for an hour. I know that is dangerous, yet I have preached that sermon many times since, and at present I am preparing a short booklet on the same.

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What did I see in it ? Principle; “Ye are ... that ye may.” That is what gripped me. “Ye are” these things, whatever ye are, “that ye may.” Then Purpose: “**Ye** are ... that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.” The thing that struck me with force was the bed-rock principle of the Church-“Ye are ... that ye may.” The Church exists for a purpose. She is not self-contained. She is a means to an end. If that is true, what is the purpose? “That ye may show forth the excellencies of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.” That is the purpose, that the Church may exhibit God to the world-may show forth the excellencies of Him Who called her.

The next question that arises: How can the Church do that is answered;-“Ye are”-what ? “An elect race, a royal

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priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." That is what she is. And in that description we are face to face with her power. In what she is lies her power. She is an elect race. The life principle is there. Priesthood-right of access to God on the basis of a life principle. Nation — true social principles within the Church for a new revelation of God to the world. Possession-no longer demon-possessed, but God-possessed. As a demon masters, obsesses, possesses, reveals himself in a man, so God masters, obsesses, possesses, reveals Himself in those who are a people for His own possession.

I never made that sermon. It came to me. I would not say that that has often occurred in my life, but sometimes it does.

Let us not run away from such an experience. Let us dare to deliver the

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message while it is living and virile in our minds. Plunge in at once and do it. We will never drown; we may go down several times, but we shall come up.

Let me add another thing. If we read our lessons in public, as they ought to be read, over and over again something we are reading will grip us. When we get home let us immediately make a note of it. I think I have found more fresh texts in this way than in any other. In private reading one reads perhaps a little quickly. In public reading, when endeavouring to give the emphasis and tone and interpretation without talking about it, so that the people can get it, scores of texts have come to me.

May I insert a word here with respect to the public reading of the Scripture? I don't know anything that is worse done in the Christian Church to-day than the reading of the Bible by preachers. That

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sounds very harsh, but I feel that it is so. There is a monotonous reading, and an academic reading, and sometimes a theatrical reading which is just as objectionable as the rest. If we could only get men to lay themselves out to read the Scripture with interpretation, quite apart from talking about it! I never read a lesson in the pulpit now without first carefully reading it at home. I may have read it scores of times, but I never go to the pulpit without reading my lesson again, and watching for its meaning. I don't mind a man stopping in the middle of his reading, to say something that will illuminate the passage, but one should do as little of it as he can. He ought to read it so that in the reading its sense is carried to the listening crowd. In the doing of it, great passages will strike us. Note them. Then we have something to turn to.

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There is another method of choosing texts, which is inevitable. In the course of our ministry, especially our pastoral and prophetic work, which is distinctive, quite a little from the more directly evangelistic, we shall sometimes have to preach on some particular subject—some bereavement, some perplexity, some special need, something in our Church life, something in front of our people who are listening to us, something existing in the city that we ought to speak about. There may be **some** invasion of the moral realm iniquitously by the civic authorities in the city. Should we preach that sort of sermon? Most assuredly. I believe that is our business. We are to know these things and to bring the Word of God to bear upon them. That is to say, special needs must sometimes be dealt with by the preacher. For we are not merely to preach truth theoretically; we

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have to show the bearing of the truth upon the practical things of life. Consequently texts have to be chosen.

Dr. Dale it was who said: "The Bible is not merely a book of texts, it is a text-book. It contains the truths of the text, the ones we have to illustrate, in their relation to the lives of our people; the Divine promises by which we are to console them in trouble and to strengthen their faith in the love and power of God." We want to remind people of that. We have never yet come to, and we never shall come to any occasion demanding a special message, but that we shall find in our Bible exactly what is needed to touch that particular condition.

When occasion arises, we must choose. Our looking will demand an acquaintance with the Bible in many ways. The Bible has something to say to every phase and every mood of human life. But to know

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what it has to say that is apposite, and where it has the text, demands of course a personal acquaintance that involves first-hand study. God help the man who, when some occasion demands this, has got to go to his concordance to find a text. **You** will hardly find it there. You may get a word that you think covers the ground, and looking it up, find that you are very far off.

Then there must be doctrinal preaching. Dr. Dale was told that people would not stand doctrinal sermons, and he replied, "They'll have to stand them," and they did stand them for forty years. There is an enormous need for the preaching of the great doctrines of the Christian Church. I do not believe that any minister is strong if he neglects them. But we have to find the doctrine in the Word. There must be the choice of those texts in which great doctrines are most simply

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stated. The revelation must be allowed to limit the proclamation, always.

Again, there are great themes. Let no man be afraid to attempt these because he is not able to reach finality. Dr. Alexander Maclaren once said :

“A man should begin early to grapple with great subjects, therefore he should seek for great texts. As the athlete gains might by great exertions, so a man does not overstrain his powers by taking great texts. The more he wrestles, the more he will gain strength. He must not merely dream over the subject or play with it. No two men will treat the same subject alike, unless they imitate each other. The things that agitate the world, the things that agitate your own bosoms-preach on them. The things we would like to have settled before we die-settle them and preach on them. The things you would ask an apostle if you had a chance

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to talk to him-get your Bible and preach on them.”

Let there be daring. Take up great themes. We may have to amend a good deal of our thinking as the years go on, but don't let us be afraid to choose great texts.

Let us look briefly at some principles of choice. First of all, we take up a text because in it there is a theme. We may recall Rousseau's recipe for a love letter: “To write a good love letter you will begin without knowing what you are going to say, and end without knowing what you have said.”

A sermon is exactly the reverse. We begin by knowing generally what we are going to say, and we end knowing what we have said. Hence the text must have a theme either in its actual statement or by suggestion. Let it be of compassable magnitude. I think some texts in the

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Bible are too small; I think some are too perfect. There is a text that I have never attempted to preach on, though I have gone around it and around it—John 3 :16. It is too big. When I have read it, there is nothing else to say. If we only knew how to read it, so as to produce a sense of it in the ears of people, there would be nothing to preach about.

Another good principle in choosing texts is to preach on the part of the Word of God that has rebuked us. The thing that got me, the thing that hurt me, the thing that shamed me, the thing that bowed me in penitence-I should preach. We can put experience into it. The thing that comforts me, that inspires me—I should preach on that. I don't think preaching is ever so powerful as when it comes out of the life in that sense. Not merely that the life morally conforms to the general ethic of the Bible, but that

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we are giving our people something that has gripped us.

I had the privilege of a great friendship with Dr. Parker in the last ripe years of his life, and I was in his vestry one day when a man came in. Dr. Parker had preached that morning a great sermon, and this man said, "I want to thank you for that sermon. It did me good." Dr. Parker looked at him, and said: "Sir, I preached it because it had done me good." He had given a message that had come out of his own life, something that had gripped him.

The preacher must see that the text is a complete statement. Watch that. For instance, we cannot preach on the text: "**Work** out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). We have no right to preach on that, though I have heard men try to do so. The Bible does not say that, even though

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we say we can find it. Yes, we can—but we can't. We have no right to preach on the working out of our own salvation with fear and trembling, and to stop there. The next word is a conjunction :“for it is God Who worketh in you both to will and to work, for His good pleasure.” We want all of it: half of it is not true. A man cannot work out his own salvation. Let the text be a complete statement.

How far are we warranted in taking phrases? We may be warranted, if we observe care. Here is a phrase, “But God.” I think you would be warranted in using that. Said the rich fool :

“And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry. But God-”

(Luke 12:19-20.)

We cannot preach that without the context, but it is a good text. God break-

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ing upon the life when the light has been excluded. I think that is fair and permissible.

I once heard Dr. W. L. Watkinson preach from these words :“Thou mayest add thereto.” Where do you find these words? David is dying. He is telling Solomon to build the temple. He tells Solomon all he has amassed, all he has gathered to build the temple, and that he is devoting also his own wealth to it. He says in substance: “There it is, Solomon; there is all that ready for you, and ‘thou mayest add thereto.’ ” (1 Chron. 22 :14). Now here is Dr. Watkinson’s treatment of that. First, The limitation of every worker for God. David comes to the end, and nothing is finished. He has to say to someone else :“I have gone so far, but it is not finished; ‘thou mayest add thereto.’ ” Every man goes out, never having finished. Second, No worker

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for God need sit down and chant a dirge. God always has someone to whom He can hand his work on.

I think that is fair. I have never forgotten the two great things in taking the illustration from the historical background; David had to lay down this work unfinished. Every one of us has to do the same thing; but God is there, and there is the next man coming on. "Thou mayest add thereto." That choice of a text is perfectly justified.

Another method of taking a text is that of getting a concatenation of passages, because of some relationship. Mr. Spurgeon preached one of his mightiest sermons on the words, "I have sinned." How did he treat it? He simply went through his Bible and showed that these words were used by the hardened sinner Pharaoh, by the doubleminded Balaam, by Achan with more remorse than re-

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penitence, by the insincere King Saul, by Job overwhelmed by the righteousness of God, by the prodigal son in his confession of unworthiness to the father, and by Judas in the agony of despair. That seems to be a justifiable method of choosing.

The Treatment of the text is a subject by itself, but some suggestions on this point may be appropriate here. First of all, be sure your text is in the Bible. I heard a man preach from the words, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." Now that is in τ Thessalonians 5:22. His whole sermon was to prove that we have no right to do anything which appears to be evil, even though it is not evil. Paul never wrote such a thing as that. The word "appearance" in the King James Version simply means the appearance of a thing that is there, not a false appearance. Your Revised Version pulls you

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up sharply-“Abstain from every form of evil.” That is a very different thing. But many Christian people understand that injunction to mean that we must not do anything that looks evil, even though it is not evil. That is misinterpretation. “Abstain from every form of evil.”

I heard a sermon on The Necessity for Prayer and Fasting, based on this passage: “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting ” (Mark g :29.A.V.). Scholarship has been driven to the conclusion that those words, “and fasting,” were added later. Our Lord did not use them. “This kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer.” (R.V.) We have not lost anything.

We know when we begin what our text is. Then the context must be considered. “Who shall dwell with the everlasting burnings ? ” I heard a sermon on that, on hell. Hell is not all that is there.

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“The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling hath seized the godless ones : Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings ? ”

That is the question. The answer comes in the context, immediately following :

“He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from taking a bribe, that **stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes** from looking upon evil; he shall dwell on high; his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; his bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold a land that reacheth afar” (Isaiah 33 :14-17).

That is not hell. That is God.

The whole point is that the prophet was looking out upon Zion, and saw the

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sinners in Zion afraid. They had suddenly seen all the city and its surroundings held in the grasp and presence of God. God was there in the burning and the devouring fire. Who can dwell therein? Only the upright in heart. Then we get that one little passage describing their position, set on high; their **defence**, “the munitions of rocks ”; their sustenance, bread and water sure; their hope, they shall “see the King in His beauty,” and a land of magnificent distances. And all that comes when we live in fire. Thus the context is always important.

III

THE CENTRAL MESSAGE

BEING sure that our text is in the Bible, we proceed to find out its actual meaning, and then to elaborate its message. Elaboration is not destruction. Nevertheless, in the process of elaboration it is always possible, very possible and very easy, to deviate at some point from the true line of thinking, and then to continue in the deflection until one finds oneself far from the thought of the text, and sometimes even contradicting its teaching.

Elaboration is far more than simple statement. The text has postulates, implicates, deductions, applications. They are important, though not patent in a simple statement. Elaboration consists in the discovery of these things and their setting forth in such form as to make the simple

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statement more luminous. The sermon is the text repeated more fully, in that these things-postulates, implicates, deductions, applications-are discovered and declared, or at least **recognised**. Elaboration is in order to clarity. It must proceed in a systematic way in order to a systematic statement.

Every sermon, then, must have a scheme, a plan, at least in the mind of the preacher, and I think that this plan should be made clear to a congregation. A great many addresses called sermons are really essays. The etymology of the two words will help us. An essay means a weighing or a trial. *The Century Dictionary* gives this definition :“In literature a discursive composition concerned with a particular subject, usually shorter and less methodical than a treatise.” That is an essay. A sermon, on the other hand, is a finished and complete discourse

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on a given subject. Therefore the preacher should define his purpose, ere he commences his elaboration. Granted a text, a general idea is suggested. A text grows on him, and he wants to preach on it. Why? Because it says something. It says something to him. There is an idea, a general idea, created in his mind by it, or he would not take the text. To communicate that idea is his purpose. That purpose should first be defined; secondly, kept in mind through all the process of preparation; and thirdly, stated at the outset in delivery.

It is quite possible that, in the course of preparation, he will have to change his purpose, or else his text, The text fastens itself upon him. There is something in it, something that appeals to him. There is a message in it of some sort. There is something in this paragraph, verse, sentence, phrase-a definite

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idea. There is the purpose, the message. He wants to deliver that message. Let him write it out briefly; then start to work on the text. Again and again he will find that the thing he thought was there is not there at all. He may get another sermon out of the text, or he may go to another text to find his sermon. First, then, purpose should be defined.

Let us take a little aside at this point, as this will throw light on the whole subject of sermonising. Sermons are different in reference to method-topical, textual,, or expository. They are also different in character. A sermon may be doctrinal, or it may be ethical, or it may be devotional, or it may be, to make a word cover a large ground, providential.

It may be doctrinal, not directly ethical, not necessarily apologetic, not invariably polemical. There are some men who never seem able to preach a doctrinal

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sermon without getting into apologetics or polemics. They are always fighting for the thing they are preaching, which is in my judgment, a questionable thing to do. But a doctrinal sermon is always didactic ; it is always of teaching value. It is always in some sense philosophical. It is always practical. That ought to be **recognised**. It is possible to preach doctrinal sermons without saying anything of their bearing on life. But that is a great mistake. If we take any one of Paul's letters and divide it at some point into two parts, we shall find a statement of doctrine, followed by the application of doctrine to duty. There are two sorts of preachers who seem to fail in this regard. There are those who pay no attention to the doctrines of our faith; they say that all that matters is the practical. There are those who have nothing but doctrine, and seem to have no recognition of its

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bearing on life. In Paul's letters neither of these mistakes is made. In them the doctrine is declared, and then it is applied. That must always be so, I think, in doctrinal preaching. The great doctrines of the faith ought to be preached. But the mere enunciation of *a* truth is of no value in a sermon, save as it is brought to bear upon life.

Then there is the ethical sermon, which deals almost exclusively with the sanctions of conduct—personal, social, national. The Christian preacher has, or ought to have a national message, certainly a social one, and of course the personal.

Again there are sermons purely devotional in the sanest and best sense, dealing with the secrets of our life, and with the maintenance of the laws of our fellowship with God. Sermons that aim, to use a phrase which is a little hackneyed, at the deepening of our spiritual life. The

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importance of them cannot be over-estimated.

There are also providential sermons, that deal with the government of God, the providence of God, in that sense.

The preacher must recognise at once what is the character of the sermon he is going to prepare. This might be decided in many ways. For instance, a great truth is recognised. It has to be proclaimed, explained, and applied. Or a message is to be delivered to meet a need. Sin demands a message from the preacher ; sorrow calls for a message from the preacher; ignorance clamours always for a message from the preacher. The true sermon is always intended to meet a need. The sermon may be argumentative, having an argument on account of doubt. There are always some who are perplexed in faith. The message may be directed to the helping of them

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and to the solution of their doubts. Or disobedience or some difficulty is calling for a message. These are merely illustrations of different kinds of sermons that we have to preach if we are in the regular pastorate.

The text being found and the purpose defined, it is necessary that the message should be put in form. This means the gathering and classification of materials and the putting of them into such systematic relation that the truth may be presented to an audience. The arrangement must always be kept in mind. That brings us right up to the scheme or plan. Dr. Parkhurst said: "Plan intensifies. Assurance of a purpose makes our work solid and consecutive. Plan centres, energises, as the burning-glass does sunbeams. Shiftlessness is only another name for aimlessness. Purpose directs energy, and purpose makes energy."

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I think that is a very helpful statement of the case. I believe that the preparation of the plan is of far more value than the writing of the sermon. The plan represents your thought, the composition represents your expression.

How are we to go about preparing our plan? There are diversities of method. No man can tell another how to make a sermon. Every man must find out by experience the best way of making sermons. Dr. Guthrie, that famous preacher, fastened on a text, and then he put on paper, just as they occurred to him, all thoughts, sentences, illustrations, that seemed pertinent to the subject in hand. Having provided a store of material in that way, he arranged it under appropriate heads, and proceeded to the proper work of composition. Archbishop Magee never looked about him for suggestions, until he sketched the idea of his sermon. I

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think that is fine. **Spurgeon** fixed upon a text, and then, for many years, gave it to his secretary, who was a minister, in his great library, saying, "There's my text." Then that minister went through **Spurgeon's** library, which he had indexed for him, and brought everything that had any bearing on that text, and piled books all round him. He took those books and read all those things, and then made his outline. That was his method. But you cannot make rules for all men.

For years I have made it a very careful and studied rule never to look at a commentary on a text, until I have spent time on the text alone. Get it down and sweat over the text yourself. That is my method. **Dr. Maclaren** thought about the text, without pencil or paper, till he had something to say, and then he went and said it with as little thought of himself as possible. **Beecher** in his later years never

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knew until Saturday night what his text for Sunday was going to be. Then he shut himself up alone, and after an hour and a half of undisturbed study on Sunday morning the vision stood before him, and he hastily sketched an outline.

Nevertheless, there are some fundamental matters. In the preparation of the plan there are two processes. Let me describe them as fundamental and final. The first is spade work. The second is done with finer tools. The first prepares for and demands the second. The second demands and perfects the first.

What do I mean when I talk about fundamental or spade work? First of all, we must get ready to begin, by preparing our mind and heart and will. Before we settle down to sermon making, let us be sure that the mind is clear and open. A man is in danger of becoming very technical here, suggesting rules, which are of

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very little use. Principles are the great things. From my own personal experience, the best hours are the morning hours. For many years I have observed this rule, that when I am at work, preparing either sermons or Bible work of any kind, I never allow myself to open a newspaper until after one o'clock in the day. I urge this upon others. It is good to go to the Bible and study with a clear mind.

There is very close relation between bodily condition and mental activity. I once heard Dr. W. J. Dawson say: "Half the bad theology in the world is due to suppressed perspiration." There is a great element of truth in it. I think if a preacher is going, to-morrow morning, to get into his work of making a sermon, he will eat his supper with a view to to-morrow morning's sermon. He must see to it that there is nothing to clog the working of his mind. The mind should be

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clear and open, the heart undivided, and the will yielded and dependent. In other words, we need the constant readjustment of our personal life to the Lord, in Whose Name we are to speak. Part of that preparation may carry us a long way from technical preparation, but without it there is always lacking the very something that makes preaching preaching.

Then, these things being granted, there follows earnest thinking. The text is the sermon, and to that the preacher gives himself in serious thought. It may be that is one of the things most difficult to do, but the habit once acquired, becomes one of the joys of life-real, personal, unbiased thinking. It is so easy, especially when one has built up a library, to look at the text, and then turn around and put the hand on a book. It is a real peril. There must be firsthand thinking, actual

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work, critical work, on the text. As I said, I have made it a rule never to turn to any commentary or any exegetical work on a text, until I have put in personal, first-hand work on that text alone. Then I take up any aid I can, and find that these aids often help me to correct mistakes I have made, But we have gained enormously if we have first sat down and toiled at the text. That means that, as we do it, we will note illustrations, the pictorial value of words, related stories in the Bible, references that we find. Only let us be very careful of reference Bibles. I am not referring to any particular Bible which is called a reference Bible. All that business of taking a text and looking to see all the other texts indicated is often destructive of real thinking and real Biblical work.

If a man settles down to his work, and makes notes and attends to the words and their idiomatic meanings in the languages

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in which this text is found, he will be mastering for himself the real meaning and the real intention of his text. Emile **Zola** once said, when some one asked him about his writing of a novel, that having compiled seventeen hundred pages of notes, his book was finished; he had only to write it. It is the compiling of those pages of notes that constitutes the real preparation for the preaching of a sermon,

I would rather have on my study shelf one book of scholarly exegesis than forty volumes of devotional exposition. Exposition in the sense of devotional application is very, very beautiful, but from the standpoint of sermon-making I would rather have Westcott on John than all the devotional books on that Gospel that I have ever seen.

Then comes the final or constructive work. So far, from the viewpoint of the

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sermon, everything is chaos. Our business is to produce cosmos, to bring all that mass of material into form. We find our material for our own sake. Perceive it, then reduce it to order and bring out the scheme as clearly as possible. We fashion our material for the sake of presenting it to our people. Prepare for presentation. This is work on the highest level, demanding all the powers of the man. Perception, memory, suggestion, imagination, are all active agencies, by which facts and truths are brought into mental control, while comparison and reason are the means of adapting them to the use of the speaker.

My subject is not psychology, but it is good sometimes just to think of the special faculties that may be employed in this work of preparing a sermon. Break them up in this way. The presentative faculty,

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the conservative faculty, the reproductive faculty, the representative faculty, the elaborative faculty, the regulative faculty. (I am quoting.) By the presentative is meant the faculty of perception, which needs concentration. By the conservative is meant memory, the holding of the thing. By reproductive is meant the faculty of suggestion and reassembling. By representative is meant the faculty of the imagination. By elaborative is meant the faculty of comparison and of relation between parts. By regulative is meant the faculty of reason and common sense brought to bear upon the whole of the material. We can take more modern terms, but the whole of one's mentality should be concentrated upon this work.

I want to say something about the use of the imagination. That is, in my judgment, the supreme work of preparation.

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That does seem a most dangerous thing to say-for imagination can play all sorts of tricks with us-unless I add that the activity of imagination must be guarded by the operation of all other faculties. Perception is the grasp of the actual, memory preserves it, suggestion reproduces it, comparison weighs it, reason balances it, imagination sets it all on fire. That is the place for imagination, but if we begin with imagination, without the use of the other faculties, we are always in danger.

May I suggest that you turn to **Ruskin**, Vol. II of *Modern Painters*, and see what he says on the imaginative faculty. I think you will find it very useful. He speaks of imagination as acting in three ways : imagination penetrative, imagination associative, imagination contemplative. Put these three down and look at them, and use imagination in these three ways,

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and you will have the whole ground covered.

We should never take any one truth, however great, and make that the only thing we see in our preaching. There is much of that being done to-day. We always know what some men will preach about next time. They see just one truth -and it is a truth. But if we don't balance the particular truth with other truths, our very truth may become, before we know it, a dangerous heresy. **Ruskin** also carefully distinguishes between the activity of the imaginative faculty in fancy, and real imagination. He says : "Fancy plays like a squirrel in its circular prison, and is happy. Imagination is a pilgrim on the earth, and her home is in Heaven. Shut her from the fields of the celestial mountains, bar her from breathing their lofty, sun-warmed air; and we may as well turn upon her the last bolt of the

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tower of famine, and give the keys to the keeping of the wildest surge that washes Capraja and Gorgona.”

What are the essentials of a plan? I have already said, the essentials of the sermon are truth, clarity and passion. Our thought now has to do with clarity. In order to that we need three things : An introduction; the message itself put into proper form, and a conclusion. Aristotle, in the laws of writing, gives the introduction, proposition, proof, conclusion. In the making of the sermon we don't begin with our introduction or the conclusion. These are the last things. First, the great central message, thought out, systematised, stated. Then we are ready for introduction and conclusion.

First of all we have to remember that there are very few texts which are not capable of more than one sermon. Almost

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any text will suggest more than one message. I found twelve sermons by Henry Ward Beecher on one text, delivered over a period of ten years. They were all different; he did not repeat himself at all. He had preached twelve times on that one text. That simply illustrates what I say; there are very many treatments possible, though the text is the same in every case. Therefore it is always necessary to decide on the particular theme that we are going to consider, when we have found our text.

For example, let us take that great text -on which I never dared to attempt a sermon, about which I have talked, and round which I have talked, and to which I have returned-John 3 :16. Think for a moment of the variety of tremendous themes that we may find in that great text. God's love for the world: there is a theme in itself, and that text would be a

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great one for it. Or we may take God's gift, His only begotten Son. We say they are together, but we have two messages there, two entirely different messages. We can find in that text a sermon on the peril of man, suggested by one word, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not **perish.**" We can find in that text the great truth, that life is provided only in the Son-"that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have **age-abiding** life." Life in the Son-a great theme in itself for a message. We can find in that text the condition upon which we may find life-faith in the Son. These are all themes. We may say :"**But** these are all parts of the one theme. We ought to take them all in when we preach from the text." Try it. There are so many things in it. I have taken it as the supreme illustration of what I mean. Is the whole text to be taken, or one of these parts?

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Again, as a general principle, in the message the theme is discussed. In our preaching the work is that of analysis, that is, division, breaking up; then synthesis, that is, the recognition of the unity in our divisions. Here is a danger which often faces us, when we get divisions that look clear-cut and sharp, but when we look at them again they do not **syn-**thesise. That shows that we have gone wrong somewhere. One must watch that no one division runs away with the others. If this occurs there is some break in our thinking.

It was the fashion in England, in theological institutions a little while ago, to tell men that the old method of division was out of date, and that the messages should flow smoothly on without any marked division. I feel that that is an entirely false idea. We have a thought in preaching; we want to get our thought over to

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our people. It is of tremendous importance that we do it clearly, with sequence and relationship. In order to do that, nothing can be more important than division. First of all, to give a clear conception to the preacher himself, so that he knows where he is going. And also it is important to the hearer, that he may catch hold of these divisions, clearly marked. Then, when presently at home that hearer goes over the ground, if the divisions are with him he will remember a great many things that we said, which he would not remember without the divisions.

A little while ago a friend and I heard a sermon. When we got home I said to my friend, "That was a marvellous utterance." He said, "Yes, it really was, but what was it about?" Sometimes you cannot discover the train of thought in a sermon. It may be you will decide it is

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not worth-while. But there is a way of letting the clear thought grip the people so that they will have your message. I have found this to be of enormous value.

Phillips Brooks said: "The true way to get rid of the boniness of a sermon is not by leaving out the skeleton, but by clothing it with flesh."

I think we have everything there. We should not try to build up the body of the sermon without the skeleton. It is a great advantage when we can see the **skeleton**—though we must not make that figure go on all fours. Let the people see the bones, the ribs, the great things that form the framework. I am far more concerned about that than about the verbiage. The clothing is important, but secondary.

The character of the divisions depends a great deal upon the text. When a text makes one or two statements clearly, we have our divisions without any difficulty.

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Sometimes we may make them by declaring the things we are proposing to do with that particular text. Sometimes the divisions are determined by the deductions we propose to make, stating them ahead very clearly, and then working from our text toward them. Sometimes by the applications that we are proposing to make.

Take one or two illustrations. Very reverently again let us take John 3 :16. Here are some things that suggest themselves to us, quite simple statements, and not constituting divisions except as we are seeking to deal with them. First, God loved the world. There is a statement which is the statement of the text, but it is not merely that He loves; He has demonstrated His love. Again, God has demonstrated His love with the purpose of calling forth confidence in that love—" Whosoever believeth." And ultimately,

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of course, He has done this in order to the salvation of those whom He loves, which salvation can only come through their confidence in Him.

Take Jeremiah 3 1:29-30:

“In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his iniquity : every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.”

Also Ezekiel 18:2-4:

“What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so

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also the soul of the son is Mine ; the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

There is a text there-“The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Rut if we are going to preach from that text we need at least the other verses. Here is an illustration of the vital relation between the text and the context. How are we going to break up that text? How are we going to state what we are going to do? Let us first consider the history of that proverb. Then let us examine God’s answer to that proverb. Then let us state the resultant truths. We have a scheme at once in front of ourselves and our congregation. Once we take that method, several things are in our mind. We have our text, but we must look at the context. When we have done so, there are three divisions. Tell the history of the proverb, and God’s answer

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to it, then we can go on making our deductions. When we do that we shall never preach from that particular text as though it was a truth. We shall start by telling our congregation that it is a lie; it is a proverb that they coined in those days. Preaching from it we must declare that if the teeth are on edge, they have become so after eating sour grapes.

Here is another. "God is love." It is infinite, so you can break it up in a hundred ways. I remember preaching from it, or trying to. I had only two divisions : "God is love." Therefore His government is perfect, Therefore human wisdom is that of obedience to His government. That is all. It is inadequate, and yet is it ? See what it does for you. Behind these two tremendous thoughts you have that greater thought, that God is love. You have a scheme, a message.

I came across an old Puritan sermon

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which has something in it of the sensational. We think now that they had nothing sensational in those days, but some of them were very sensational, and yet they were very true to the text. John Burgess announced that he would preach on "Beelzebub driving and drowning his Hogs." You know where he went for his text. This the way he introduced it:

"And they besought Him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them. And He gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came down, and entered into the swine, and the herd rushed down the steep into the sea, in number about two thousand; and they were drowned in the sea.' In these words the devil verified three old English proverbs, which, as they contain the general drift of my text, shall contain the substance of this ensuing discourse and constitute our divisions. They

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are; The devil will play at small game rather than none. Second; They run fast when the devil drives. Thirdly; The devil brings his hogs to a fine market.”

These were real proverbs current at the time. He proceeded: “The devil will play at small game rather than none at all. ‘All the devils besought Him, saying, Send us into the swine.’ They run fast when the devil drives. When the unclean spirits entered into the swine, they ran violently. The devil brings his hogs into a fine market. ‘Into the sea.’”

That was peculiar, but at any rate it was clear, and I will undertake to say no congregation ever forgot it. They got his divisions.

Let me give you a slightly different one, by another old Puritan. He preached on this text:

“So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem; for he did eat continually at the

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king's table ; and was lame on both his feet."

It is a beautiful story about David and his love for Jonathan. He made his divisions in this way:

"My brethren, we see here to-night, first, the doctrine of human depravity—Mephibosheth was lame. Second, the doctrine of total depravity—he was lame on both his feet. Thirdly, the doctrine of justification—he dwelt in Jerusalem. Fourthly, the doctrine of adoption—he sat at the king's table. Fifthly, the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints—he did eat at the king's table continually."

Now, we may read all that into the text; we can make the text the illustration of our doctrine; but it is not really there.

I once heard a man preach on the Good Samaritan. Here were his truths. First

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of all, he said, the Good Samaritan is a type of Jesus; the wounded man is the type of the sinner; the pouring in of the oil and wine is the type of the Saviour's work; the inn is the type of the Church; he gave him two shillings, which means, "Having food and raiment, be therewith content." That kind of sermon makes me nearly fall from grace.

We must be careful. Take for example the text:

"Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone."

Now this is almost invariable misinterpreted in sermonic literature, as far as I have read it. It is used as a very solemn warning-there comes a moment when a man may be so wedded to his idols that he is abandoned by God. But you cannot study your prophecy of **H**osea without having that idea smashed to fragments.

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May a man be so wedded to his idols that God says, "Let him alone?" I don't think so. **Hosea** was a prophet of the northern kingdom principally, but he had Judah in mind all the time. At certain points it is as though he sent his voice ringing down from Israel, to whom he was preaching, to Judah. And that is a message to Judah concerning the northern kingdom of Israel. "Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone." Make no league with Israel. **Hosea** was warning Judah against complicity with Israel. It is still a great text. But it does not mean the other thing at all. To see how far it is from meaning that God abandoned Ephraim, just take another text out of the same prophecy of **Hosea**. God is speaking: "O Ephraim, how shall I give thee up?" By the time you are at the end of the prophecy, you see in the prophet's vision Ephraim

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restored. Ephraim in the earlier movements is represented by the prophet as bringing forth fruit, his own fruit. At the end it is said of Ephraim, "From me is Thy fruit found." I mean the whole prophecy denies the right of any man to take that method of treating the text.

Dr. P. T. Forsyth, when he was in the United States some years ago, told me a little incident that greatly amused him. He was staying at a certain seminary, and the professor of homiletics greatly impressed Dr. Forsyth because of a habit he had. On Monday morning he took the homiletic class, and each student gave a resume of what he had done the previous day. Dr. Forsyth said that the professor said to one student:

"You were preaching last night?"

"Yes, sir, I was preaching."

"What text did you take? "

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“I took that text, ‘How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ? ’”

“A great text. Tell us how you treated it.”

“I didn’t try to treat it. I took the two obvious points.”

“What are they?”

“First, the greatness of our salvation.”

“Very good. What was the second?”

“A little advice on how to escape if we neglect it.”

Dr. Forsyth said, “I think there is a great deal of preaching along that line just now.” I also am afraid there is.

Let us take some more particular statements of principles. We must decide on our principle of division by having very clearly before our own mind the purpose and the theme. We must have our theme and our purpose in our mind, and then do our best to declare the truth so that

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it may be clearly understood. If that is our purpose, our divisions will come out of that purpose. Do we want to show the bearing of a truth on life generally, some phase of life, some immediate need? Our divisions will take colour from our intention and our purpose, Is our sermon to be one in which we desire those listening to us to have an apprehension of a great truth, or do we want them to see how it affects life? Our divisions will largely depend upon our purpose.

Let our main divisions be as few as possible. In the process of analysis many subdivisions will be found, but when we get down to prepare our scheme, we shall find that they can generally be grouped under two or three heads. There is the fetish of the three; we must not be bound by it. Let the divisions be few; let them influence our whole scheme. Never introduce new material into the conclusion.

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There is a temptation to do it. We have gone through our scheme, we have stated our truths, and we are likely to say something we have not said before. It is a great mistake. If there is something else not pertinent to our immediate theme in our text, note that fact and preserve it, for we may use the same text in that way at another time.

Let our divisions be clearly stated. There again is a point where there may be others who would give other advice. But I think that it is very important so to state them. Clearly stated, our hearers then get hold of our scheme, and they follow us more intelligently. They see where we are going.

Here is an illustration of how not to do it. The divisions are very fine. The text is :

God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

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You see and feel the vastness of that great text. But note this scheme of divisions made by a preacher who said as he started:

“The text naturally divides itself into three parts. First, we have presented to us the transcendental properties of the Divine nature. Secondly, we have the anthropomorphic relations under which those transcendental properties of the Divine nature stand revealed and become apprehensible. Thirdly, we have the Scripture symbolism by which these relations and mysteries of the transcendental properties of the Divine nature are apprehended, which constitutes worship.”

That is like a bad edition of the House that Jack built! The divisions are excellent, He had right ideas. But he immediately put his ideas before the

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congregation in such language, as I venture to say not one in a hundred would grasp.

Here is a far better example :“Thy word have I hid in my heart that I sin not against Thee.” First, the best treasure, “Thy Word.” Second, in the best place, “Hid in my heart.” Third, for the best purpose. “That I sin not against Thee.” The contrast between these two is evident. That is what I mean by clarity of statement.

As to the time to state the divisions, personally, I think at first. I think it is good to tell our congregation just what we are after, and where we are going. State these things as far as possible so as to reveal unity. John **Angell** James, that great preacher of Birmingham, long ago said: “The divisions should be used for conjunction rather than disjunction.”

IV
THE INTRODUCTION AND
CONCLUSION

GRANTED the text as such, the theme of the sermon, and the scheme roughly divided into three parts, an introduction, the main body of the message, and the conclusion ; granted the message, which is to be the main body of the discourse, and which is systematic in concept and statement ; and granted further that the divisions of that sermon are to be marked by three things-*clarity, brevity and inclusiveness*, let us now consider the matter of introduction and conclusion.

The main body of the discourse being prepared, in order to its delivery, two very important matters require attention: First, introduction, that is, how to call the attention and prepare the mind of the

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hearers to the consideration of the theme; second, conclusion or application, that is, how to fasten the truth upon the conscience so as to produce the results which it is intended to produce.

First, then, I want to speak of the purpose and of the properties of an introduction.

It goes without saying, but it is important to remember that an introduction must introduce. It must introduce the theme, of course, but it must also sometimes introduce the preacher. He has his text, his theme, his message ; his consideration has resolved it into its component parts so that it is ready. Now, how is he to begin? He must introduce his theme generally to his audience before dealing with it particularly.

Someone has said that the introduction to a sermon may be likened to the prelude

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to a poem, the preface to a book, the portico to a building, or the preamble to the statement of a case in court. The prelude introduces us to a poem, suggests its method and meaning or message. The preface to a book also does that. Of course the preface to a book is always the last thing written. I think that is a justifiable conclusion. The author writes his book as Luke did, beginning with verse 5 of what we call chapter one, and he wrote the first four verses after he had written everything else. That is evident if we look at the tenses in the preface; we see that he was writing it last. It was written to introduce the reader to the subject to be considered.

An introduction, then, must introduce. Sometimes there are obstacles to be overcome. We may feel that there are certain prejudices that we ought to overcome in order that the congregation may come face

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to face with the message. Those of us who have preached often know what it is to realise that an audience may be prejudiced concerning the preacher. Sometimes the prejudice is in favour of him. Sometimes the audience is prejudiced against the view that they know he holds on general themes; sometimes they favour the view. These are all obstacles. Prejudice in favour is perhaps more dangerous than prejudice against. I do not know that I enjoy anything more than knowing I have a crowd in front of me who do not hold my views. I have a great chance then. Sometimes one has to preach to men who are antagonistic to Christianity to begin with. That puts one on his mettle, and makes him a passionate advocate of his own truth, and that cannot hurt him. It keeps him from all sorts of mistakes. If the audience is entirely in favour of the preacher, then let him beware. He may

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fall into all sorts of aimlessnesses and carelessnesses.

Another obstacle that often has to be overcome is the ignorance of the congregation. I think one of the greatest volumes on preaching is Dr. Dale's Yale Lectures on the subject. Dr. Dale was a tremendous preacher, of massive type, of great intellect, perhaps the greatest intellect in the Congregational ministry for a hundred years, with the possible exception, on other lines, of Dr. Forsyth. And yet note the simplicity of Dr. Dale's method in this quotation :

“Never be afraid of making your explanation of any truth of fact or duty too simple and elemental. One of the most charming popular preachers and scholars that I ever knew said to me once that he always took it for granted that the people knew nothing about the subject on which he was speaking. A few months ago, in a

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passage of the great speech on the Eastern question, delivered at Birmingham, Mr. John Bright showed that consciously or unconsciously, he spoke on the same principle. For instance, he explained the precise position of Constantinople on the Bosphorus, and described the Sea of **Marmora** and the Dardenelles. I did not happen to be in Birmingham when the speech was delivered, and as I was reading it in a railway carriage in the north of England, I wondered whether for once his oratorical instinct had failed him, and whether the audience had shown any signs of irritation while they were listening to this elemental information. When I got home my friends told me that this passage of the speech was listened to with the closest attention. Mr. Bright was right, as usual, and he had given me another illustration, in addition to the innumerable illustrations which he had

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given me before, of the true method of how to draw audiences. The thoughts of ordinary men on most things not connected with their own profession, are very indifferent. Large numbers of persons who have been accustomed to read the Bible, and to listen to preaching all their lives, have the loosest possible acquaintance with the details of Biblical history, and their concepts of doctrinal truth are extremely vague. They are grateful to any man who will make their knowledge of the external facts of Holy Scripture definite, and who will give sharpness and form to the outlines of their conceptions of truth.”

That is a very suggestive paragraph, and applies to the whole sermon, but it is particularly important in the matter of getting your congregation introduced to your theme.

Then, of course, an introduction has as

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an obstacle the preoccupation of the congregation. The people sitting in front of us may be preoccupied. The best way to know this is to remember how we sometimes have felt when listening to a preacher.

Then there is the attitude of the audience. I don't think we can **characterise** any audience by a single word, but we do have those in our audience who are patently indifferent. I don't know how it is with other men, but I preach to congregations, never **before** them. I see the people. I cannot help it. I am conscious of anybody who is indifferent. I do not look at that person, but half the work of the introduction is to get that person.

What then should be the properties of an introduction ? Simplicity, pertinence, and courtesy.

Simplicity. It is good to avoid the superlative arrest, whether there is in the

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nature of the introductory statement any-
thing tremendously arresting, or whether
it is an emotional arrest or volitional, or
whether it is in the thought presented, or
the language used, or the voice. Some
men begin with a crash, a staccato note.
Let that be avoided. The probability is
that we cannot live up to it all through
the sermon. Few men can do so.

Again, the introduction must be **charac-**
terised by pertinence to the subject. In
the introduction the theme should be
clearly stated, sometimes by a corrected
view of the text. We may know that the
popular conception of the text is not the
true conception. It is well to introduce it by
pointing this out, sometimes by the state-
ment of the theme, or of the text itself in
entirely different words, but always as an
indication of what is proposed to be done.

Dr. Pattison, who was professor of
Homiletics in Rochester for many years,

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gives this illustration of an introduction and statement of divisions on that very old theme of the prodigal son :

“Doctors take violets to make physics. Preachers take the Lord’s stories and make sermons. Well, the process is just the same, stealing the beauty to get the good. One wishes we could keep the violet and have the physics still. One wishes we could keep the story and have the sermon still. I would almost venture to-night to try to enlarge the Lord’s story without letting it lose its story form. And I want you to think about what the lad asked for, or what a sin is; where he went, or what a sin does; how he came home, or how that sin is dealt with.”

And then he simply told the story, at each point emphasizing the purpose as he had revealed it.

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By an introduction the atmosphere should be created. This depends on the theme. It is well sometimes to indicate one's conviction of the supreme importance of the particular theme, sometimes to declare its gravity, sometimes to suggest its comfort, sometimes to admit its difficulty. All these things get the audience into attention.

Again the introduction to the message should be **characterised**, as the message itself, by courtesy. By that I mean, not apology by the preacher for his theme, and certainly not foolish cajoling, but respect for the rights of the crowd, for the fact that the man listening has a right to confront the message with his own thought.

I think we have the finest illustration of the method of introduction in the great discourse that Paul delivered on Mars Hill. How did he begin? Here is one of

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the little things in that glorious King James' Version that I lament immensely, and the Revised Version has corrected it, although they have put the possible alternative in the margin. Paul began:

“Ye men of Athens, I perceive in all things that ye are very religious “-

not “very superstitious.” I know the Greek word sometimes bears that translation, but translation should be according to context. He did not say they were a superstitious crowd ; he would have lost them. Moreover, it was not improper eulogy; it was a tremendous statement, but full of courtesy. He continued in effect :

“Demonstration is in your altars, and the supreme one is in that pulsing, palpitating altar with its tale of agony. ‘To an unknown god.’”

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He began on the level of what they were. He knew as well as anyone their faults. But he was courteous.

So much for the introduction. Now as to the conclusion. Here there are two things; the purpose and the method of conclusion.

A conclusion must conclude. And in order to conclude well it must include. In order to conclude perfectly, it must also preclude. When we are concluding we are concluding. We are bringing everything to an end. A conclusion must include the things which have been said, as to their spiritual and moral impact and appeal; and it must preclude the possibility that those who listen may escape from the message, so far as is possible. That means a good deal. Dr. Dale said, in the same volume from which I have already quoted :

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“An English preacher of the last generation used to say that he cared very little what he said the first half hour, but he cared a very great deal what he said the last fifteen minutes. I remember reading many years ago an address published to students by Henry Ward Beecher, in which he gave a very striking account of a sermon by Jonathan Edwards. Beecher says that in the elaborated doctrinal part of Jonathan Edwards’ sermon the great preacher was only getting his guns into position, but that in his applications he opened fire on the enemy. There are too many of us, I am afraid, who take so much time getting our guns into position that we have to finish without firing a shot. We say that we leave the truth to do its own work. We trust to the hearts and consciences of our hearers to apply it. Depend upon it, gentlemen, this is a great and fatal mistake.”

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That explains the whole thing. The aim of every sermon is stirring the human will, as I have said before. A discourse which makes no spiritual or moral appeal or demand is not a sermon. Truth is something that must be obeyed. Said our Lord:

“Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.”

There is a moral and spiritual objective, never to be forgotten by the preacher. Does he preach on “Have faith in God?” What is the use, unless he make a personal application? “Repent ye, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” There is no use in showing what repentance is unless the appeal to repent is made. The preacher is not merely interpreting repentance: he is calling men to repent. “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” If

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I merely examine that man and leave it there, and do not lead my congregation to some state of sympathy, I am failing. "Thou hast searched me, O God, and known me." Discuss that as the poetry of a great singer, but until we have made some man or woman inclined *to go* somewhere and say the same thing, our preaching has not reached its goal. The recognition of this fact from the beginning should fill us as we preach, and prepare for the conclusion.

How important this part of the sermon is I think can hardly be over stated. Preach for a verdict. It is no use talking morality to the crowd unless we show them it is for them. TOO many preachers close with a wrong Biblical note. Too many preachers close sermons that are really powerful in their discussion of moral values and spiritual things by saying :

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“**But**, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you.”

The best note is, “Thou art the man.” And we have never come to the true climax of preaching until we have left that impression upon our hearers.

A word as to the method of the conclusion, The avenues of approach should be the intellect and the emotions. We are storming the citadel of the will. At the close there **should** be recapitulation and personal application and elaboration of the truth, intellectually presented. As to emotion, let feelings and brain work together, sometimes by pathos, just as the theme itself is moving us. Never forget that we are storming that central will.

The last sixty seconds are the dynamic seconds in preaching. Of course, it is important not to approach the last sixty seconds until they are really near. If we value our reputation for truthfulness

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and fair play, don't let us tell our congregation we mean to conclude and then fail to keep our promise. Don't let us say, "Now finally," and presently, "In conclusion," and a little later on, "One word more," and then still later, "And now before we part." Dr. **Pattison** said that that kind of ending to a sermon reminded him of Pope's ode, with a very different application :

“ Trembling, hoping, lingering,
flying,
O the pain, the bliss of dying.”

Don't let us be getting to that sixty seconds until we are there. But let us make that last sixty seconds, as we are able, instinct and intense with all the power of our message.

The whole point of this study is, that we need such introductions as will fasten

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the attention of our congregation upon our theme; then the sermon in its body; and then the gathering up of everything with the realisation that we are talking to human beings in whom the supreme matter is their own will power, and we are constraining their will toward yielding to the highest and the best.