

Adaptation of Measures

by Catherine Booth

Catherine Booth's sermon emphasizes the importance of adapting methods of evangelism while preserving the core message of the Gospel.

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:10, Acts 2:4, Romans 10:14, 1 Corinthians 9:22, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Galatians 3:27, Galatians 5:6, 2 Timothy 4:2

Topics: "Evangelism Methods", "Spiritual Unity"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches about the principle of Adaptation, emphasizing the need to adapt to different circumstances and individuals to effectively share the Gospel. She highlights the humility and flexibility of the Apostle Paul in becoming weak to win the weak and the importance of being all things to all men to save some. Catherine Booth stresses the diversity of gifts and administrations but the unity in the Spirit, Lord, and God's work. She challenges the traditionalism and formalism in the Church, advocating for a return to the simplicity and spirituality of the Gospel, focusing on real spiritual life and truth over mere forms and ceremonies.

Transcript

I HAVE chosen, this afternoon, five or six different passages all exhibiting the principle of Adaptation, on which I am to speak. The first is 1 Cor. ix. 20-22:

"And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law."

To them that are without law as without law; but here he carefully guards himself by a parenthesis, lest he should seem to favour a lawless Antinomian Gospel, "not without law to God," not independent of the great moral law, "but under the law to Christ," in which is fulfilled ALL LAW.

"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

"To the weak became I as weak,"--masterpiece of human humility! Most people want to appear strong, but here is a man coming down, and appearing a weak man, that he might win the weak. That is the humility of Jesus Christ:

The Lord give us the like spirit! Again, 1 Cor. xii. 4-6:

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit; and there are differences of administration, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

Some people want the Spirit to work in everyone alike, and in all times the same, but He chooses to have diversities. Again, Galatians iii. 27, 28:

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

That is, so far as the privileges, duties, and obligations of Christ's kingdom are concerned, there is neither nationality nor sex; and Galatians v. 6:

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."

All mere ordinances and ceremonies come under the Apostle's term "circumcision." And II. Timothy iv. 2:

"Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

What a hue-and-cry there is because we Salvation Army people save men "out of season!" And Jude 22, 23:

"And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire."

'Oh, no,' say some of our conventional friends, 'you should not make a difference.' Nevertheless, in all these six texts, the principle of Adaptation is most distinctly laid down.

Now, we have spent the two last Sabbath afternoons in trying to point out our view of the characteristics of a pure Gospel, and I think we have succeeded in doing this so clearly that no person who followed us carefully, can imagine for a moment that we would hold, or teach any adaptation of the Gospel itself. As we stated before, we deemed this so above all adaptation--so above any change, that we would not be responsible for transposing its order, much less altering its matter, that we would not take a dot off one of the "i's," so sacredly intact do we believe the Gospel of Christ in its matter ought to be kept.

We believe also that the ORDER of God ought to be strictly maintained; that it is as rational and true in philosophy as it is in divinity; and that the way the Spirit operates upon the minds of men is just the same as ever. This we clearly and most carefully pointed out, so that what we have to say this afternoon, you will please bear in mind, has nothing to do with the GOSPEL MESSAGE ITSELF. We have tried to show our idea (or what we believe to be the Holy Spirit's idea) of a pure Gospel; but when we come to speak of modes and measures, that is quite another thing.

I think, from the texts we have read, and from many others equally plain and relevant, that we find a most easily-gathered truth running all the way through the New Testament, namely, that forms and ceremonies are nothing except as they embody and express real spiritual life and truth. That circumcision is nothing, and that uncircumcision is nothing; baptism is nothing, and being unbaptized is nothing; the Lord's Supper is nothing, and abstaining from the Lord's Supper is nothing, in itself, as a matter of form, for he embraces

under circumcision all mere outward forms and ceremonies; all these are nothing, but "KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD:" that is, you may have all these performed upon you, and regularly perform them yourselves, and be but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals, if you keep not the commandments of God; for circumcision availeth nothing, in another place, and uncircumcision availeth nothing, but faith--of what sort?--that WORKETH BY LOVE: that proves its obedience by its deeds.

Therefore, we start with that fundamental truth lying clearly before us in every page of the New Testament, that forms and ceremonies, whatsoever they may be, are nothing except as they embody and represent REAL SPIRITUAL LIFE, and truth and action--action! Now, it was the great sin--the crowning condemnation of the Jews--that they had frittered away the spirituality and practical bearing of the Divine Law, clinging to those forms and ceremonies which were instituted only to embody and symbolize it.

Would to God they had let go the form when they let go the spirit. Jesus Christ wishes they had. He tells them it would have been far better. He told them they were children of the Devil, notwithstanding their holding on to their relationship to Abraham and all the outward forms and ceremonies of their ritual.

They had better have come out and avowed themselves unbelievers, than have gone on professing to be the children of God, while they were doing the work of the Devil. But they would not receive this teaching. It was too cutting for them, and so they would not have it. It was true, nevertheless. They held on to the form whilst the spirit had gone. They were "making clean the outside of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess, appearing beautiful outward, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." And, dear friends, all corpses are very much alike, when the spirit is gone out of them--one is found to be about as good as another.

Alas! there is this tendency still in our fallen human nature. It is so much easier, or Satan makes it look so much easier, to an unregenerate man, to rest in a form, than to seek till he finds the spiritual grace which that form represents. That is to say, it is so much easier for an unregenerate man to be circumcised, or to be baptized, as the case may be, to partake of the Lord's Supper, to keep outwardly the Sabbath Day, to abstain from acts of immorality and open sin, and to be decently moral and religious--all this he can understand and do for himself, and it looks to him so much easier, and so it is, in the first instance, than bringing his evil, unregenerate heart to God for Him to circumcise it, and write His law in it, as He promises to do under the new covenant.

Now, that is what God wants every man to do. He wants him to bring this heart to Him, and let Him renew it. He says, "I will circumcise your hearts to keep my law." But, no! the unregenerate man rests in the outward form. He will not be at the trouble to sacrifice his idols, and cry mightily unto God. He will not seek until he attains the fulfillment of these promises; so he sits down and rests in the form.

Alas! alas! How many thousands in this so-called Christian England of ours today are just there. They have got the form; they are like the Jews--they are Pharisees with a Christian creed instead of a Jewish, the same in CHARACTER, only different in name. That is all the difference, hanging on to the creed of Jesus Christ, while they know nothing of its spirit, the form without the power; and they deny their professed Lord every day. Oh! are there any of this class here? My friend, my friend, if you never find it out until you come to die, you will find it out then, but it may be too late. May God, the Holy Spirit, help you to find it out this afternoon, and bring that unrenewed, unrepentant, evil heart of yours to the Cross; bring it to God, and wait, and weep, if need be, and struggle, and knock, and cry, as He tells you, until He does renew it and write His law in it; then the outward form will be the expression of the inward grace. Then the

fruit will be good, because it springs from a good root inside. The Lord help you!

This tendency to rest in form is just as great as ever, and, instead of putting away their idols, and bringing their conscience to be cleansed and kept clean by the precious blood, prayerfully and carefully walking before God, striving in all things to please Him, people get an outside form, but LIVE just like the world around them, calling Jesus, "Lord, Lord," but doing not the things that He says. Now, I say that a pure Gospel requires that we bring our evil HEARTS to God to be renewed, and that we resolutely put away our idols, and that we wait on Him by the Cross until He renews our motives, tempers, tendencies, feelings, and dispositions, and makes us new creatures in Christ Jesus. Instead of doing this, people go on being circumcised or baptized, as the Jews did, and they call themselves "Israel," as they did; whereas, of the spiritual Israel they are utterly ignorant. They are the children of Hagar (as Paul says), and not the children of the promise. May the Lord help you to come and be made children of the promise!

Now, as in the individual, there is such a tendency to rest in form, so in the Church collectively; hence this tendency to a formal religion. Just as it was with the Jews--their Temple service and the paraphernalia of Judaism--was all in all to them, and they thought that Jesus Christ was the most awfully severe and uncharitable person who ever appeared on the face of the earth, because He told them the truth. And the same class of character presents the same attitude now. We shall see when we get to the Judgment seat of Christ which is the true charity--that which covers up things, or that which tears off the bandages, and shows people their hypocrisy and, as we have just read, reveals to them the secrets of their hearts. I fear that we are very largely in the same condition as the Jews were when Christ came. I say "very largely," for I know that there are grand and glorious exceptions; but I speak of the great whole, and I am backed up in this opinion by some of the most thoughtful and spiritual men of this age. It is the lamentation everywhere--this formality and death. It reaches us from all parts of the land, yea, from all parts of all lands. I once heard a great divine, a leader of spiritual thought in his day, who has recently passed to heaven, say, "I consider that the writings of the Prophets are far more applicable to the state of the churches now than the writings of the New Testament, for we are in the same lapsed and fallen condition, as churches, as Israel of old was." So many think, and so many teach.

If this be the case, WHAT IS TO BE DONE? What would strike you should be done in this state of comparative-spiritual eclipse? Evidently it would be madness to go on as we are. That will mend nothing! Somebody must strike and do something worthy of the emergency. "There is no improving the future, without disturbing the present," and the difficulty is to get people to be willing to be disturbed! We are so conservative by nature--especially some of us. We have such a rooted dislike to have anything rooted up, disturbed, or knocked down. It is as much the work of God, however, to "root out, and to pull down, and to destroy," as "to build and to plant;" and God's real ambassadors frequently have to do as much of the one kind of work, as of the other. This is not pleasant work; but what is necessary to be done? Is it not manifestly necessary that we should go back to the simplicity, and SPIRITUALITY of the Gospel, and to the early modes of propagating it amongst men?

On the two last Sunday afternoons we tried to show what was the pure Acts of Apostles Gospel--calling men to forsake their sins, to cast away their idols, come out from the world of the ungodly and be separate in order that their sins might be forgiven, and that God might receive them, and they become His sons and His daughters. Last Sunday we spoke of faith and what it would do for us.

Now, with respect to the outward manifestations and propagation of the Gospel it is equally necessary to go back. We have such a heap of rubbish to carry away--the accumulated traditionalism of ages to go

through and dig under--that it sometimes takes a considerable amount of time, and force of character, and a great deal of the Spirit of God to enable us to do it. Nevertheless, it must be done if we are to reach a better state of things.

It seems to me, in order to do this we should not shrink from a recognition of our lapsed and fallen condition. That was what the Jews did at the teaching of Jesus. They would not have His reproach. They would not have the light because it condemned them. They rejected it. They persisted they were the children of Abraham--the children of the promise. They persisted they were all right, and they pointed to the Temple and to their ceremonialism as a proof of it; they would not have His testimony, would not admit that they were wrong. Do not let us imitate them. Let us recognize this state of things. Let us look it fairly in the face. Honesty is always the best policy both in spiritual and in temporal things. There is nothing gained by ignoring a disagreeable truth. It is best to face it. Now there it is and the best way is to bail any ray of light that comes to us from any part of the heavens, even though a carpenter should bring it, as He brought it to them--or a fisherman, or a woman. Never mind--let us hail the light and apply it to ourselves. Let us bring our hearts and lives out into its blaze, and examine them by it, and improve it to our own salvation and to the salvation of others. If the Jews had done that, they would have been saved, and their nation. "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, `this twelfth hour of the last day' the things that belong unto thy peace; but now" (because of thy obstinate rejection) - "they are hid from thine eyes." The Lord help us to take the light home to ourselves, each one.

We have seen that it is clearly laid down in the texts I have read this afternoon, that the law of adaptation is the only law laid down in the New Testament with respect to modes and measures. I challenge anybody to find me any other. While the Gospel message is laid down with unerring exactness, we are left at perfect freedom to adapt our measures and modes of bringing it to bear upon men to the circumstances, times, and conditions in which we live free as air. "I became all things to all men." The great Apostle of the Gentiles who had thrown off the paraphernalia of Judaism years before, yet became as a Jew that he might win the Jews. The great, strong, intellect became as a weak man, that he might win the weak. He conformed himself to the conditions and circumstances of his hearers, in all lawful things, that he might win them; he let no mere conventionalities, or ideas of propriety, stand in his way, when it was necessary to abandon them. He who was brave as a lion, and hailed a crown of martyrdom like a conquering hero, as he was, yet was willing to submit to anything, when the requirements of his mission rendered it necessary. He suffered his limbs to be ignominiously thrust into a basket, and himself let down over the wall when necessary, for the success of his work. He adapted himself to the circumstances. He was instant in season and out of season. Oh! what a hue-and-cry there is about out-of-season Christianity; "of some making a difference" pulling them out of the fire by the hair of the head, if needful! Never mind--save them, SAVE THEM. That is the great desideratum. Save them--pulling them out of the fire. Adapt your measures to your circumstances and to the necessities of the times in which you live. Now, here it seems to me that the Church--I speak universally--has made a grand mistake, the same old mistake which we are so prone to fall into, of exalting the traditions of the elders into the same importance and authority as the Word of God, as the clearly laid down principles of the New Testament.

People contend that we must have quiet, proper, decorous services. I say, WHERE IS YOUR AUTHORITY FOR THIS? Not here. I defy any man to show it. I have a great deal more authority in this book for such a lively, gushing, spontaneous, and what you call disorderly service, as our Army services sometimes are, in this 14th of Corinthians than you can find for yours. The best insight we get into the internal working of a religious service in Apostolic times is in this chapter, and I ask you--is it anything like

the ordinary services of today?

Can the utmost stretch of ingenuity make it into anything like them? But even that is not complete. We cannot get the order of a single service from the New Testament, nor can we get the form of government for a single church. Hence one denomination think theirs is the best form, and another theirs; so Christendom has been divided into so many camps ever since; but this very quarrelling shows the impossibility of getting from the New Testament the routine, the order, and the fashion of mere modes.

They cannot get it, because it is not there!! Do you think God had no purpose in this omission? The form, modes, and measures are not laid down as in the Old Testament dispensation. There is nothing of this stereotyped routinism in the whole of the New Testament. Why? Now there may be some who may have difficulties in this matter. I said to a gentleman, who came to me with this and that difficulty about our modes and measures, 'I will meet your difficulties by bringing them face to face with the bare principles of the New Testament.

If I cannot substantiate and defend them by that I will give them up for ever. I am not wedded to any forms and measures. To many of them I have been driven by the necessities of the case. God has driven me to them as at the point of the bayonet, as well as led me by the pillar of cloud, and when I have brought my reluctance and all my own conventional notions, in which I was brought up like other people, face to face with the naked bare principles of the New Testament, I have not found anything to stand upon!

I find things here far more extravagant and extreme, than anything we do--looked at carefully.' Here is the principle laid down that you are to adapt your measures to the necessity of the people to whom you minister; you are to take the Gospel to them in such modes and habitudes of thought and expression and circumstances, as will gain for it from them a HEARING. You are to speak in other tongues--go and preach it to them in such a way as they will look at it and listen to it!

Oh! in that lesson we read what beautiful freedom from all set form and formula there was! What freedom for the gushing freshness, enthusiasm, and love of those new converts! What scope for the different manifestations of the same spirit. Everything was not cut and dried. Everything was not pre-arranged. It was left to the operation of the Spirit, and the argument that this has been abused, is no argument against it, for then you might argue against every privilege. Here is abundant evidence that these new converts, each one, had opportunity to witness for Jesus, opportunity and scope to give forth the gushing utterance of his soul, and tell other people, how he got saved, or the experience the Holy Ghost has wrought in him.

And look at the result! "If there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." What unkind things have been said of The Salvation Army, because people have fallen on their faces under the convicting power of the Spirit at our meetings, but you see this is Apostolic! And, oh, friends, what a glorious service this would be!

You say, it would look so strange. More the pity. More the pity that this natural, easy, domestic, familiar kind of testimony and witnessing of divine things should have become strange. May it not be because the experience which prompted it has become strange? May it not be that there is no more desire to testify because there is little to testify about? May it not be that there is want of the utterance of the Holy Spirit through the tongue because there is less of it in the soul?

Oh! then, should we not make haste back to those days of simplicity and power? Should we not pray to be set free from the traditionalism and routinism in which Satan has succeeded in lulling us to sleep? I ask any saved man--Do you not remember the gushing love and enthusiasm of your first-found liberty? how you longed to tell everybody, and if you had been placed in such circumstances as these Corinthian converts, how gladly you would have testified to what Jesus had done for you.

It was only the repressing, keeping down, and ultimately, I am afraid the all-but extinguishing of the Holy Spirit's urgings that has led to the state in which many of you now are, and also to the dead way in which many of our services are conducted.

Now, let us look fairly at these things. I maintain that the only qualification--the only indispensable qualification--for witnessing for Christ is the Holy Ghost. Paul, expressly, over and over again, abjures all merely human equipment. He expressly declares that these things were not the power, even where they existed, but that it was the Holy Ghost. Therefore, give me man, woman, or child, with the Holy Ghost, full of love and zeal for God, and I say it is a great strength and joy to that convert to testify to the Church and to the world, and it is the bounden duty of the Church to give him the opportunity to do so. The Lord is going to demonstrate in this land, that He is not going to evangelize it by finished sermons and disquisitions, but by the simple testimony of people saved from sin and the Devil, by His power and His grace. He is going to do it by WITNESSING, as He began.

Now, I say, read your New Testament on this point, and you will be struck with the amazing amount of evidence for this unconventional kind of service. The world wants some more PENTCOSTS. When shall Peters and Marys be so filled with the Spirit that they cannot help telling what God has done for them--male and female, men, women, and children--like the woman of Samaria, who, when she had found Him of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote, went and fetched her fellow-townsmen and women to hear him. He wishes you to do the same, and this is the way the Lord is going to gather out His great and glorious kingdom in these latter days by the power of testimony in the Holy Ghost. He only wants witnesses to be able to go and say, "We speak that we do know"--that is the qualification. The Lord is multiplying such witnesses. Bless His holy name.

But you may say--what did the Master Himself do? Well, he adopted these very measures. I was so struck with this, when someone said, "Why, you are sending people to preach who cannot read or write." For a moment I was staggered, but I asked him, "How many of the Apostles do you suppose could read and write when they were first sent out?" And then it was the questioner's turn to be staggered. There is no reason to suppose, with but two or three exceptions, that any of them could.

Education then was far more uncommon than now. It was not reading and writing that was the great qualification for preaching Christ; it was KNOWING AND SEEING! It was not the power of eloquence, but it was being able to cast out devils, that was the test. Give me somebody able to cast out devils, and I don't care whether they can read or write, or put a grammatical sentence together. That is of no consequence whatever. Why did not Jesus Christ call the doctors and scribes of His day?

There were plenty of them--highly educated men with trained and disciplined minds. He was amongst them in the Temple, when He was twelve years old. He knew them. How was it He did not select these? He who could have commanded a legion of angels, could surely have commanded a few scribes and doctors to go to preach the Gospel. Why not? He acted on the law of adaptation. He wanted His Gospel preached to the great masses, not to the select few. Not to the educated "upper ten," but to the great

masses of mankind.

How was He to have His Gospel so preached, but by men like unto themselves? They fled from the educated doctors. They would not listen to the doctors, and they will not now. It may be very wicked, and obstinate, and foolish, but such is the fact --they never have and they never will. Hence, Jesus Christ, instead of working a miracle, which he never did when it was unnecessary, chose the weak things of the earth to confound the mighty. He would, in the other case, have had first to have untaught all those scribes and doctors almost all they had learned.

He would have had to set them free from the bonds of traditionalism. He would have had to remould their minds, and then equip them. There was no necessity for this, when He found the fishermen ready to His hand. They were just the men He wanted. They only required tempering with the Holy Ghost, and they were ready for the work. They thought as the people thought; they spoke with and associated with the people, and, in fact, were of them. As He wanted the masses of men evangelized, He chose men from amongst the masses to evangelize them.

Here was infinite wisdom. "I thank Thee, oh, Father, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." But He had a purpose, in it, and the purpose was this--that the Gospel might be propagated in all climes and conditions of men, through any kind of an agent--Greek, Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, man, woman, child. Any person who has experienced its power in their souls may go and speak it to anybody they can get to hear them and everywhere!

We are free as air and sunlight as to our choice of agencies, and it is time the Church woke up to this. The Lord have mercy on us! Is there not work enough to do? It makes my ears tingle and burn with shame when I hear people saying, 'You must not send agencies here and there, and we can't have our organization interfered with.' I say, 'Are all the sinners converted in your neighbourhood?' Nay; has every poor, lost, wretched soul heard the name of Jesus, and the testimony of His Gospel?

Are there not teeming thousands round about you who never heard His name, and who care nothing for Him, who live every day trampling His law under their feet? For Christ's sake, send somebody after them. If they will not have your doctors of divinity and your polished divines, get hold of fishermen and costermongers and send them! Let the people have a chance for their souls. Let them hear, for if they hear not, how shall they believe. Oh, they are dying for lack of knowledge--they are, friends; thousands, are dying for the lack of knowledge.

It is quite a common thing for us to get people into our services who say, 'I never knew there was anything so pretty as that in the Bible. I didn't know you were reading from the Bible. We never heard anything like that before.' Hundreds of men in this country were never in a place of worship, save to be christened or to be married, and a good many, sad to say, are living without being married. While we have been standing UPON OUR DIGNITY, WHOLE GENERATIONS HAVE GONE TO HELL!--if the Bible is true.

How much longer shall we stand there? If Jesus had stood upon His dignity He would never have come to die between two thieves. The whole work of redemption is a work of humiliation, self-sacrifice, and suffering; and if we are not willing to follow Him in that, we may as well give up professing His name.

The Lord help us to go down, down amongst the fishermen, amongst the poor, the weak, the unlearned, the vulgar, to "condescend to men of low estate."

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