

The Importance of Preaching - Part 2

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

The importance of preaching lies in its ability to unveil Christ, convey a clear message, and bring people to salvation, sanctification, and service.

Scripture: Isaiah 50:4, Colossians 3:17, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 2:3

Topics: "Preaching Methods", "Bible Study"

Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas emphasizes the importance of different types of sermons, including expository, biographical, topical, and sermons tailored to specific audiences like children, men, boys, mothers, and evidential sermons. He highlights the need for a dominant theme, clear message, definite aim, right attitude, and true methods in preaching. Thomas stresses the significance of daily Bible study and meditation for a preacher's perennial freshness and effectiveness in delivering sermons.

Transcript

II. Expository.

On almost every hand today we are urged to make our sermons more expository because our people need instruction in the Word of God; but those who proffer this advice are by no means clear as to what is meant by expository preaching. Dr. Maclaren's textual preaching is essentially expository, even though it deals with one verse only, because it is thoroughly Biblical and arises immediately out of the text. But usually by expository preaching we are intended to mean the use of some passage of Scripture to be explained verse by verse and applied to our hearers. There are serious dangers for most men in attempting anything of this kind at a time of worship, as distinct from a Bible Class, because the treatment is liable to lack unity as well as to be protracted to too great a length. If inquiry be made, it will be found that there have been very few really expository preachers in the Christian Church; expository, that is, as distinct from Biblical preachers. Spurgeon was a Biblical preacher, so was Moody, but neither of them could be called an expository preacher. Maclaren is the nearest approach to a preacher who is at once Biblical and expository, and his expositions will be found to be the finest models of all expository preaching.

Three requirements should be emphasized in every endeavour to present to our people an exposition of any passage. (1) It should only concern the salient features. There are many details that must be resolutely omitted, lest we are too long, and lest we blur the definite impression. (2) It should mainly concern the spiritual meaning. Anything historical, or geographical, or oriental, must be kept resolutely

subordinated to the supreme issue; it is a sermon, not a lecture. (3) It should always have a searching message. The application in an exposition should be emphasized and never omitted. If these three essentials are observed: only salient, mainly spiritual, always searching. There is no reason why many of us should not develop into capable and acceptable expository preachers.

Some examples of this kind of sermon may perhaps be offered.

Psalm 16. The Life of the Believer. (1) Its Commencement (verses 1-4). (2) Its Course (verses 4-8). (3) Its Culmination (verses 9-11).

Psalm 23. The Divine Shepherd, and Seven Reasons why "I shall not want." The rest of the Psalm provides the justification for the statement of verse 1.

Luke 7:36-50. Simon and the Woman. (1) Simon the Sinner. (2) The Woman a Sinner. (3) Christ's Attitude to Both.

Luke 15:11-32. The Prodigal Son. (1) The seven steps down. (2) The seven steps up.

The Prayers of St. Paul.

The Thanksgivings of St. Paul. "Thanks be to God."

The Doxologies of St. Paul.

III. Biographical.

As there is so much of human life recorded in the Bible, more than half of Holy Scripture being given to us in the form of history, the biographical element of preaching should not be overlooked. Its value is evident because of the living interest in other lives, and human character is so vividly and faithfully depicted in Scripture that there are few men and women recorded who do not provide counsels and warnings for the spiritual life. The larger biographies found in both Testaments are a perennial source of helpfulness, and no one can take such subjects as those of Abraham, or Jacob, or Elijah, or John the Baptist, without discovering a mine of wealth for intellect and heart. Not the least valuable point of these biographical sermons will be that we shall be enabled to introduce the experience and make direct personal applications to the lives of our people when they least expect them, and when they cannot charge us with introducing anything merely personal. No one who has tried this method with the suggestive help and guidance of such biographies as those by the Rev. F. B. Meyer, Dr. Alexander Whyte, or Dr. George Matheson, will ever fail to give biography a prominent place in his ministerial preaching and teaching.

The shorter biographies are equally valuable for this purpose. Even though very little is told us of many of the characters recorded, sufficient is very often found in a short space to indicate lines of thought and reveal developments of character. Thus the three chapters in which Nicodemus is mentioned lend themselves admirably to a sermon on the spiritual development of the "ruler in Israel," as (1) the Secret Inquirer, (2) the Timid Advocate, and (3) the Open Confessor. The passages connected with Barnabas can be easily and naturally grouped under five headings, giving to us so many aspects of his character and service. The same is true of the Mother of our Lord, whose spiritual life may be comprised in five definite periods. [Perhaps the author may venture to refer to his own little book, *Methods of Bible Study*, for further illustration of these statements.] Such a book as Dean Howson's *Companions of St. Paul*, will provide ample material for several truly helpful sermons. The one great need in all this biographical

teaching is to make the men and women live over again, to show the reality of their experiences, and to bring them out of the framework of old days into living contact with modern experiences. When this is done, biography will prove one of the most attractive features of the Christian ministry.

IV. Topical.

By topical preaching is not meant preaching that deals with "Topics of the Day," but subjects found in Scripture associated with various texts rather than with one only. The subjects of Scripture are almost endless, but the following may be adduced as examples of this method.

St. Paul's Three Ambitions. 2 Cor. 5:9. 1 Thess. 4:11. Rom. 15:20 (see Greek).

The Three Burdens. Sin (Psalm 55:22). Service (Gal. 6:5), Sympathy (Gal. 6:2).

Christ's Visits to Bethany. (1) As Teacher. (2) As Sympathizer. (3) As Redeemer. (4) As Lord.

"Whatsoever ye do ... do all." (1) "To the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10:31). (2) "In the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). (3) From the soul (Col. 3:23; see Greek).

"Be of good cheer." Five occasions on which this word (see Greek) was used by our Lord.

"All things are possible." (1) With God. (2) To the believer.

"I have sinned." Eight confessions of sin in these words: four real, four unreal.

"So." (1) "Loved" (John 3:16). (2) "Great salvation" (Heb. 2:3).

"Wist not." (1) Moses. (2) Samson.

"Thorns." (1) Ruin (Gen. 3). (2) Redemption (Gen. 19). (3) Restoration (Isa. 55).

Peter's Three Sleeps. (1) Unripe Experience (Transfiguration). (2) Unfaithful Life (Gethsemane). (3) Unquestioning Trust (Prison).

The Beatitudes. (1) Of the Psalms, (2) of the Gospels, (3) of the Apocalypse.

The Four Suppers. (1) Redemption (Luke 14:16-24). (2) Communion (1 Cor. 11:23-29). (3) Joy (Rev. 19:9). (4) Judgment (Rev. 19:17).

Justification, in its seven aspects.

V. The Secret of True Scriptural Preaching.

For all phases of preaching two requirements are absolutely essential.

1. There must be daily Bible Study. First, the Bible alone without any outside helps. Then, and then only, with all available assistance.

2. There must be daily Bible Meditation. This means that we shall read primarily for our own life. What grips us will assuredly grip our people. These two, Study and Meditation, are the secret of perennial freshness and force.

The four varieties of sermons named above will probably cover most of the ground of an ordinary ministry. From time to time it may be found necessary to preach what may be called "learned" sermons. At any rate it will do no harm to show the people that we are capable of discussing high and profound topics, assuming of course, we can do it. It will also widen our own and their views, and will help us to realize that there are "more things in heaven and earth" than are dreamed of in ordinary Christian experience and philosophy. But all this must be very occasional, and will necessarily depend entirely upon circumstances and spiritual need. A man who preaches learnedly simply to air his knowledge stands self-condemned and will not fail of being "found out".

When we again contemplate all that is implied and involved in these varieties of sermons, we are impressed afresh with the need of constant study, careful reading, and earnest prayer. Granted these three, we shall never be at a loss for subjects; indeed, the only trouble will be that there will be so much material left that can never be preached.

Section 8. Essential Qualities in a Sermon.

Although we have discussed some of the vital requirements necessary for the preparation of the sermon, it seems imperative to consider still more fully some of those essential features of substance and form which go to make up the true sermon.

I. Every Preacher should have a Dominant Theme. Our theme is a Person rather than ideas or truth in the abstract. It is a weakness of many a ministry that it concentrates attention on ideas. Dr. Dale once confessed that for years he had been thinking only of the truth he preached, and not of the people to whom he was preaching. "Christianity is Christ," and we must never forget this in our preaching. It was the Person of Christ Who constituted the theme of Apostolic preaching ("Whom we preach," Col. 1:28).

And it was the Person of Christ as crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), not the Cross, but Christ crucified. And it was also Christ as Lord (2 Cor. 4:5). This great truth is found exemplified in all the earliest preaching. While there are various relationships between Christ and the soul, it is always the Person of Christ, whatever may be the relationship. Philip preached Christ (Acts 8:5) and Jesus (Acts 8:35). The disciples ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ (Acts 5:42), and Paul preached Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 17:3).

All doctrines and duties are to be linked to Him. It is only thus that a sermon becomes living, personal, and not merely intellectual and abstract. Truth is always to be associated with Christ, "Truth as in Jesus". And our ethics must always be associated with His love, His grace, His spirit. It is only in the presence and power of Christ that our sermons and addresses, however orthodox, will kindle spiritual fire in the soul. In those fine articles in the British Weekly, to which reference has already been made, in which Ian Maclaren reviewed his ministry shortly after his resignation of his Liverpool church, we read the following: - "I now clearly see every sentence should suggest Christ, and every sermon, even though His Name had not been mentioned nor His words quoted, should leave the hearer at the feet of Christ.

In Christ there is an irresistible charm; without Him the sermon may have beauty, it will not have fragrance. With Christ everyone is satisfied, although men may differ widely about Christian creeds and Christian customs. After Him every human soul is feeling, and in Him alone all human souls meet. ... As it now appears to me, the chief effort of every sermon should be to unveil Christ, and the chief art of the preacher to conceal himself." It is recorded of a congregation which had an earnest, able, but very learned preacher, that while valuing his teaching they longed for a more definite presentment of the Person of our Lord.

One Sunday morning when the preacher reached the pulpit, he saw on the book board a small piece of paper with these words: "Sir, we would see Jesus." The good man realized what it meant, took the hint, and proclaimed the Lord Jesus in all His fullness. The effect on the congregation was immediate and great, and before very long the preacher found another piece of paper on the pulpit book board with these words: "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." Since then more than one pulpit has had attached to its book board or lectern the words, "Sir, we would see Jesus," and I know from personal experience that the suggestion has been passed on to quite a number of places as indicative of the supreme aim of the preacher in every sermon. [See also the article by Dr. Denney on "Preaching Christ" in Hastings' Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels.]

II. Every Preacher should have a Clear Message.

By this is meant a portion of Divine truth, selected, prepared, and delivered under the guidance and in the power of the Holy Spirit, and adapted to present needs. Unless there is some definite truth from God for those to whom we speak, the sermon will fail of its distinctive purpose. A story is related of a Scottish minister who was given to weeping during the delivery of his sermons. A visitor had been a worshipper in his church on one occasion, and observing the minister crying, inquired of a member of the congregation the cause of the tears. The whispered reply was, "If ye was standin' up there and had as little to say as he has, ye wid greet yersel'." The message must be clear first of all in the preacher's mind, and then clearly expressed on the preacher's lips. Otherwise it will never be clear to the hearers.

III. Every Preacher should have a Definite Aim. Knowledge is not an end but only a means in preaching. Herein lies the difference between the essay and their sermon. We have to convince the intellect, to stir the heart, to quicken the conscience, and to move the will. Matthew Arnold's well known phrase, "Light and leading," aptly expresses what sermons ought to be. Sermons are intended to lead as well as to illuminate. Cicero said that the be-all and end-all of eloquence is actio.

What then is our aim in sermon work? It has always one or more of these three ends. (1) Salvation, personal and present; (2) Sanctification, full and constant; (3) Service, hearty and devoted. Under these three aspects, of Christian teaching, perhaps the aim of every sermon can be put. They should be ever in view, and we must never rest content in ideas, however interesting, true, or important. It is recorded of a French doctor that he performed a certain surgical operation a great many times, while an English doctor had only performed it on eight occasions.

The Frenchman was asked how many lives he had saved. He replied, "None, but then the operation was so brilliant." The Englishman saved seven out of the eight. All the brilliance of our sermons will count for nothing unless we are enabled to "save some". A Briton and a Boer went out shooting deer for food. The Briton took a case of cartridges with him, the Boer only took one. "Why," asked the Briton, "do you only take one cartridge?" "Because," was the reply, "I only want one deer."

It is this definiteness of aim which gives point to such phrases as "a word in season" (Isa. 50:4), "food in due season" (Luke 12:42), "present truth" (2 Peter 1:12). In an article which appeared in the Sunday School Chronicle some time ago, the following words seemed to go to the heart of the problem:- "An ignorant man may draw great draughts of spiritual strength from the higher life, when a more mentally alert man may be spiritually meager and barren. Why? Because the mind, wholly absorbed in its ideas, is not tuned to the Infinite.

The freer and humbler soul expects to meet the Saviour, is conscious of His nearness, speaks as in His presence. It is not the full mind is any hindrance; far from that. It is the mind averted from Christ, or the mind wholly occupied in its own processes, that fails to bless." One point in particular may perhaps receive special notice. It has been said that there are few lives into which some shadows or sorrows have not come, and that for this reason the message of comfort, which means in the true sense of that old word, an inspiration to strength, courage, and consolation, should not be often away from our messages.

To quote Ian Maclaren again:- "The review of the past has convinced me that while preaching has various ends, the chief ought to be comfort. It is useful in its way to explain the construction of the Book of Isaiah, and to give the history of Hebrew literature, but it is better to minister the consolation of Isaiah's fifty-third chapter to the weary heart. ... The critical movement has not only affected students in their studies, but also preachers in their pulpits; and while I have ever pled for full liberty in criticism, and have used that liberty myself, I am free to acknowledge that I would have done more good if I had been less critical and more evangelical.

And by evangelical I mean more heartening and more comforting. People are interested in an expository discourse; they are lifted by a consolatory discourse. Life we may take for granted is hard enough for every hearer, and every man is carrying his own burden. ... My conclusions on this point are (and I offer them with confidence to younger men) that the people appreciate literature in your style but do not desire literature for your subject; and that while they do not undervalue information on the Bible, they are ten thousand times more grateful for the inspiration of the Book; and that our preaching should be more according to the words of Isaiah, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.'

IV. Every Preacher should occupy a Right Attitude.

It is very helpful to observe the various names given to the preacher in the New Testament. He is a "herald" (1 Tim 2:7), an "ambassador" (2 Cor. 5:20), an "evangelist" (2 Tim 4:5), a "witness" (Acts 1:8), a "teacher" (1 Tim 2:7), a "prophet" (Eph. 4:11), and an "encourager" (παρκαλω, 2 Cor 6:1). When the Apostle uses the words "we beseech you," we readily enter into his spirit as he endeavoured to present his Master to others. He also uses three words in 1 Corinthians 14:3 which need careful study by all preachers: Edification, Consolation, Exhortation, thereby appealing respectively to the feeling, the intellect, and the will. When we gather together the aspects of truth underlying all these titles of the preacher, we realize that he should be a man of conviction, a man of sincerity, a man of sympathy, and a man of authority.

V. Every Preacher should employ True Methods. Here again the New Testament will be our best and safest guide. When we study "the preaching of the blessed Apostle Paul," we cannot fail to notice the various words that he uses in connection with his message. Thus we read of him as follows: "Opening and alleging that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer, and to be raised from the dead, and that this Jesus is the Messiah, Whom I proclaim to you." "Opening," "alleging," "proclaiming".

He expounded the Scriptures, he placed the truth carefully before them, and proclaimed the Person of his Master as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. In his work at Corinth another word is used. "He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4). "Reasoning," "persuading". Thus he appealed to mind, heart, and will. In Rome, we are told that he preached the kingdom of God, and taught the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness (Acts 28:31).

"Heralding," "teaching". Here are the two aspects of the preacher's work; announcing his Master "to them that are without," and instructing believers in Christ. At Colossae we learn yet another method of the Apostle, for we read of him "admonishing and teaching every man in all wisdom" (Col. 1:28). The admonition was for warning and the teaching was for instruction; the two sides of Christian teaching. The minister must be Salt and Light. But the finest method of all is that of the Perfect Teacher, as illustrated for us in His dealings with the Woman of Samaria.

That chapter should be pondered again and again by every Christian preacher who desires to know the deepest secrets winning the soul for Christ. We observe that our Lord took four steps towards the possession of that life. (1) He first attracted her heart by asking for a draught of water, and thereby predisposing her to listen without prejudice to anything else He might have to say. (2) He then arrested her mind by giving her food for thought as to the living water and the difference between that and the water in the well. (3) When the woman's interest was aroused, and her desire stirred to ask for the living water, our Lord made His searching appeal to her conscience by telling her to go and call her husband.

When the woman fenced with this awkward and unwelcome inquiry, and endeavoured to divert attention to a religious custom on the merits of Jerusalem and Samaria, our Lord kept her to the point and insisted on the necessity of spiritual reality and no mere locality in worship. 4) Then at length when the poor soul was broken down, unable to make any further resistance, our Lord assured her soul by the present and personal revelation of Himself as the Messiah. The very truth that was hidden from the Jews and refused by our Lord to them, was given gladly to this weary, convicted sinner, who so badly needed Him and His grace.

Heart, mind, conscience, soul - to these four elements of human nature every sermon should make an appeal. Probably the subject will from time to time lead to more stress being laid on one or other of the elements, but not one of them must be out of sight in any sermon that can be called really Christian. The real difficulty will be found in regard to preaching to the conscience. It is not difficult for a preacher to win attention and sympathy, nor is it very hard to provide food for thought and set them in to work; but the great problem will be to press home the truth upon the conscience, and to prevent the sinner from shielding himself from Divine conviction by any side issue such as the woman attempted.

While Nathan was telling David that exquisite story about the rich man and the poor man, we can see how the deepest sympathy of the King was stirred, but it was when the dagger went home, "Thou art the man," that his conscience was touched, and all else that the prophet desired was realized. So, in our preaching, we must drive home the truth to the conscience, for it is only as the conscience is wakened and convicted that men will feel their need of a present salvation, a present Saviour, and will be ready for the message of a personal Christ by which our sermons, as we have seen, must always be marked.

It is not to be supposed that these five qualities - a dominant theme, a clear message, a definite aim, a right attitude, a true method - exhaust all the essential features of a sermon, but at any rate it may be fairly said that, given these requirements, God's blessing cannot fail to follow the word preached.

Section 9. Delivery.

The intellectual and spiritual preparation of the sermon though very important, is not everything, for the finest material will fail unless it is properly delivered. Public speech is intended to be effective, which means that it must effect something as a means to an end. What then are the elements necessary for the effective delivery of a well-prepared sermon?

1. The Spirit of the delivery needs attention, first of all. It goes without saying that the speaker should be in earnest, for without this all else counts for nothing. He should also be fearless. Nothing mars a sermon so much as a hesitating or nervous delivery, as though the preacher was not at all sure of the truth of his own words. All the great prophets of the ages have been men of courage, and they never feared the face of man as they declared the message of God.

"Oh! a glorious gift is prudence,

And they are useful friends

Who never make beginnings

But where they see the ends.

But give us now and then a man,

That we may crown him king,

Who just will scorn the consequence,

And just will do the thing."

But the fearlessness must be blended with tenderness. However courageous a man may be, his fearlessness alone may suggest severity and a disregard of the feelings of his audience. He must blend tenderness with his courage if he is to be an effective speaker. Then with earnestness, clearness, fearlessness, and tenderness, happily harmonized and blended, he must pour over it all a spirit of trustfulness. His message is not his own but his Master's, and he must so deliver it as to feel and let other people feel that he looks to God for the blessing and the power. 2.

The Manner of the delivery comes next, and it will be in the manner that the spirit is very largely expressed. The following elements seem essential to all true speaking: - (a) The preacher must be humble and not self-assertive. (b) He must be bright and yet not light. (c) He must be winsome without undue expression of feeling, or overflow of emotion. Any such excess of feeling is apt to be attributed to what, for want of better words, may be described as "gush" or "oiliness". (d) He must be reverent, as befitting his theme. (e) He must be natural in gesture.

Everything about his movements should be seen to be spontaneous and free, not studied and artificial. 3. The Voice calls for special attention. (a) The utterance should of course be distinct; enunciation good, with vowels and consonants properly pronounced. The old rule cannot be too often emphasized: "Use your lips and spare your throat." (b) The expression should be correct. While it may be inevitable that the preacher should have certain indications of the locality from which he comes in the accent that he puts upon words, yet his speech should be free from all vulgarisms. (c) The pitch of the preacher's voice should be varied, and he should take especial care not to be too loud to be heard.

If Milton can speak of that which is "dark with excess of light," it is only too possible for a man to speak so loudly that he cannot possibly be heard by his audience. (d) The tone should of course be sympathetic, possessing and expressing a personal quality without which all the orthodox doctrine and all the literary grace will count for very little. 4. The Method of delivery is one that admits of more difference of opinion. Shall we read, or shall we speak? If the sermon is read, the manuscript ought to be thoroughly known, so

that the preacher may be as free from it as possible.

To this end it should be clearly written, so that there may be no hesitation in the course of reading. If the sermon is spoken rather than read, the manuscript should first of all be analyzed into notes which can be placed in the preacher's Bible, or else he should dispense with notes altogether, which he will find far the better plan. The one thing to be avoided is memoriter preaching, unless it be felt necessary to memorize the beginning and the ending. This method of preaching will prove burdensome to those who adopt it, and will almost certainly tend to artificiality and lifelessness, for the man will be constantly thinking of what is coming next, and be attending to his memory rather than to his message and his people.

Great preachers, like Chalmers, have read their sermons, but most of the outstanding preachers favour the spoken utterance. The value of the written sermon lies in the clearness of thought, the precision of language, the balance of treatment thus afforded, together with the permanent use that can be made of the manuscript. And yet, however well a man may read his sermon, he cannot be so sensitive to the needs of the congregation, and his delivery will be hindered to some extent.

Canon Liddon's method in St. Paul's was the perfection of reading, and yet hearers could not help being conscious that the sermon was being read. The advantage of the spoken sermon is that it gives ease and vigour of style, affords an opportunity of the expression of the personal element, and leaves the whole man free to bring himself and his message to bear upon the people. And the disadvantages are that it tends to diffuseness, to occasional superficiality, to inaccuracy of speech and to disproportion of treatment.

The true way seems to be to write the sermon in full, as though it were to be read, and then to analyze it and preach either with or without notes. This method combines the advantages of both methods with a minimum of the disadvantages. But whatever may be the method adopted we must take care that our sermons are written in the style of speech and not of essays, and that they are the entire personality of the preacher. For those who think that preaching without notes is an utter impossibility, the careful study of Dr.

R. S. Storr's *Preaching Without Notes* may be warmly commended, while a similar work dealing almost entirely with extemporaneous preaching is *The Use of the Eyes in Preaching*, by Neville. 5. The Aim of the sermon should be kept in view all through the delivery. The preacher has a definite object and it should never be overlooked. As we have seen when considering the preparation, he is concerned not only for the presentation of truth, but for its acceptance and practical use. In the course of delivery this aim should be constantly before us.

Archdeacon (now Bishop) Crossley once propounded a conundrum at a Diocesan Conference in Melbourne: "Why is a parson like a camel?" He gave the answer: "Because he can go on and on and never know how dry he is." 6. The Rules of delivery are few but important. They may be summed up by saying that all speech should be in the key of "B natural". The speaker should be himself and his best self. There is much to be said for the old familiar advice: "Begin low, go slow, rise higher, take fire, wax warm, sit down in a storm."

At any rate there is sufficient truth in the suggestions to enable us to see what is required. Some years ago the Dean of Canterbury, in presiding at a meeting where the speakers were limited to ten minutes each, gave them three pieces of advice which he had read in a German periodical. He first read the German and then gave his audience the terse, colloquial English rendering: "Stand up; Speak up; Shut up." Mr. W. T. Stead offered some practical counsel to public speakers a little while ago which is well worth while passing

on: - "1.

Never speak without having something to say. 2. Always sit down when you have said it. 3. Remember speech is dumb show when it is not audible. 4. Think definitely, pronounce clearly, stand naturally, and do not speak too fast. 5. Welcome articulate interruption, no matter how hostile. 6. Two things should never be lost - your temper and the thread of your discourse. 7. Remember that the eyes are as eloquent as the tongue. 8. Never hesitate to let yourself go, at the right time. 9.

Never read your speech, but always have heads of discourse handy. And never forget Cardinal Manning's words of wisdom to myself: 'Be full of your subject and forget yourself.'" Sir Squire Bancroft, in the paper at the Church Congress in 1907, to which reference has already been made, asked the pertinent question why most of the sermons to which he had listened had been forgotten? He attributed it to the bad delivery, because while the theology and erudition were all that was desirable, the men who spoke were so devoid of the art of public speaking as to leave their words wasted and worthless.

The first duty of a preacher, he urged, is to make himself heard, and the second to be impressive and convincing. And he actually advocated the rule that every Curate should pass an examination before being allowed to mount a pulpit, because "a bad preacher will empty a Church more quickly than a good preacher will fill one." It may perhaps be thought that in giving expression to these suggestions about delivery, they are more suited to the platform than to the pulpit, and also that too high a standard is being set for ordinary speaking; but the subject is so important that it seems essential to emphasize its value in every possible way.

Without any desire to discourage any earnest worker, but on the contrary with every desire to be of service, we are confident that granted personal sincerity, genuine character, and conscientious work in preparation, very much can be accomplished in the matter of delivery, by imitating the highest models, and by a quiet, steady, resolute observance of the various principles and methods which govern acceptable speech.

Section 10. Sermons To Different Sections.

While the main principles of preaching apply to all sermons, it is useful, if not essential, that a preacher should study as carefully as possible the art of "putting things" before particular classes and sections of his congregation. A few illustrations may indicate what is meant.

I. Sermons to Children. This is a kind of work which is well worth cultivating, however great the trouble. What should be the characteristics of a sermon to children? 1. It should be short. Fifteen minutes will be quite long enough. 2. It should be straight. The lessons should be definite and not too numerous. Perhaps two points will be ample, though one carefully stated and elaborated might be found better. 3. It should be simple. By this is to be understood that it is childlike, not childish.

Language for children must necessarily be simple, or else it will fail of its purpose. We once heard a speaker warning children of from nine to twelve against "compromising their position". A preacher once asked a number of children to tell him the meaning of the word "analysis". Silence reigned supreme after the question was asked, and the preacher was compelled to give the answer himself. He said that analysis was "synonymous with synopsis". On another occasion, at a large Children's Service, the preacher beamed upon his young flock and said benignly that the scene before him was "one of unparalleled sublimity".

It was soon one of unparalleled restlessness. And at yet another children's gathering the clergyman, in appealing for gifts to send Bibles to children in India, told the boys and girls that of course the Bibles would be in the "vernacular". It was a pity he did not himself use the "vernacular" on that occasion. 4 It should be illustrated. The illustrations or anecdotes used for children need the greatest possible care. (a) They should be true, or else parabolic. Preachers must beware of using any anecdote about which they are at all uncertain.

Moral honesty is absolutely required on this point. (b) The illustrations should be ad rem, or else they will fail of their purpose. (c) They should not be overloaded with detail or else their object will be lost. (d) The moral should not always be kept to the end, but either introduced elsewhere, or perhaps left to the application of the children. It is a well-known fact that children are only too quick to see the application of what is being told them. Some years ago a well-known Scottish preacher was addressing a large gathering of boys in Glasgow, and after telling them an interesting story, he said, "Now boys, the moral of this is," when a young ragamuffin cried out, "Never mind the moral, sir, gie us I another story."

Object Lessons are a source of perennial interest to children. A lead pencil, a house, a penny, are but a few out of many such objects that can be utilized to convey spiritual truths. At the same time it will need a fair amount of masculine common sense to avoid a misuse of objects for moralizing purposes. Preachers to children cannot do better than study the sermons and addresses of those who have been specially used of God in this work. Perhaps to this day there are no volumes to compare with those books of sermons well known thirty years ago, by Dr.

Richard Newton of Philadelphia. Some of us were almost brought up on such admirable books as Rills from the Fountain of Life, Bible Jewels, and many others which are full of fine illustrations and admirable methods. Of more recent sermons, the volumes by various authors in the series known as "The Golden Nail Series" will be found very suggestive, and any volumes by the Rev. James Learmouth should be noted by speakers to children. Another volume worthy of consideration is Little Sermons to Children, by the Rev. R. C. Gillie. From these and other similar volumes every earnest true-hearted preacher who desires to work among children will be enabled to learn "how to do it".

II. Sermons to Men.

This is a day of special services and classes for men, and there are few clergymen who do not desire to be of service to the men of their flock. My honoured friend, the Rev. J. E. Watts-Ditchfield, in arguing for the fundamental importance of work among men rather than among children has a great deal to say for himself and his position, for most assuredly if we can lay hold of the men we go far to lay hold of their children at the same time. It is only possible in our space to make a few simple suggestions on this subject, and we must refer our readers to books that deal specially with the subject. Preachers should not think that Men's Meetings always need to be addressed on the subjects of Gambling, Intemperance, and Purity. While these subjects are important and essential, there are many other topics of equal importance and definite bearing for the manhood of our land. For a long time it was my happy privilege to conduct a weekly men's service in a London parish, and there were very few Biblical subjects which could not be adapted and applied to men. We should not shrink from teaching as well as preaching, and personal appeal. Men need instruction as well as inspiration and invitation; and if the same men are in the habit of coming to a meeting week by week, the need of teaching is all the more imperative. They will value it and will rejoice in the opportunity of hearing modern topics and Biblical truths put in such a way as to appeal to their intelligence.

Three characteristics seem to be required in all addresses to men: (1) Thought; we must give the men something to think about. (2) Sympathy; we must express our thought in terms of brotherly sympathy. (3) Directness; and we must make a definite appeal to the men to accept our thought and to live it day by day. Above all, our addresses to men should invariably be concerned with the Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour and a Master as well as a Teacher and an Example. It is all very interesting and useful to speak of the "Ideal Man," and to preach the Christian ethic; but men also need the Christian dynamic, and this is only possible as they receive into their heart and life a personal Saviour, a personal Friend, and a personal Lord. As a preacher to young men, few excelled the late Dr. Thain Davidson of Islington, afterwards of Ealing, and his volumes of sermons, which are still available, are admirable models of how to preach to young men. For actual work amongst men, especially in Men's Services, nothing could be better than Fishers of Men, by the Rev. J. E. Watts-Ditchfield, and Bible Class Work and Warfare, by the Rev. Frank Swainson. Once again, let it be said that work for men only will be found among the most fruitful methods of genuine service in any parish.

III. Sermons to Boys.

In some respects this is perhaps the hardest of all preaching, because it is so difficult to define and express what precise religious experience ought to be expected from boys. We are so apt to read back into our boyhood the spiritual experiences of more mature age, that we find it almost impossible to set due limits on what is to be regarded as the religion of boyhood. One thing is perfectly certain in all preaching to boys: we must be manly. While we are good, we must not be "goody-goody". Here again, it is essential to make a personal and present Christ a reality to boys, and in particular to emphasize Divine grace as a present power. Some years ago the Head Master of Eton, the Hon. and Rev. Edward Lyttelton, called attention to this important feature in all work among boys. We are too apt to preach an ideal which they are to realize in the future when they become men, and the result of this is that we are only too apt to lose them during that terribly difficult period from thirteen to seventeen, when boys as well as girls are "where the brook and river meet." The only way to overcome this difficulty is to lay the greatest possible stress upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the present Saviour of boyhood, and the gift of the Holy Spirit as the present and momentary secret of victory over sin, and holiness of heart and life. Mr. Arthur C. Benson has some fine suggestions in his Upton Letters on Preaching to Boys. He pleads for homeliness, simplicity, directness, shrewdness, and incisiveness. He thinks that holiness, saintliness, and piety are virtues which are foreign to the character of boys, and the ideas often imply sanctimoniousness and hypocrisy. There is sufficient truth in this to make us very careful about our ideal and our actual holiness which we present to boys. Mr. Benson is only too correct when he deprecates for boys what he calls "feminine religion; a religion of sainted choir boys and exemplary deathbeds". All these dangers can be avoided if Christ is a living reality to the preacher, and if the preacher is able to recommend his Master by that godliness and manliness which finds expression in that highest of all Bible descriptions, "a man of God".

IV. Mothers' Meetings.

Addresses to Mothers will almost inevitably fall to the lot of even the most junior Curate, for he will be asked to speak from time to time at the weekly Mothers' Meeting, which is an essential feature in every well-organized parish. What is the poor young fellow to do, especially if he has never had the faintest experience of talking to working women, or even of knowing anything about the life of the working classes? He will be well advised if he limits his addresses for a long time to come to subjects directly connected with the Gospel. He must not dream of lecturing the women present on matters of household hygiene, and he should avoid in every possible way any advice on the bringing up of their children. A

young unmarried preacher dealt on one occasion in the course of a sermon on the training of children in the home. He was full of counsel, eloquently expressed. A few days afterward he met a lady who heard the sermon, and she expressed her pleasure at his method of treating the subject, adding, "I should like to see your nursery." "My dear madam," replied the preacher, "I am not married." "I thought not," said the lady. We must neither lecture, nor hector the women who come to Mothers' Meetings, for it is not our place and province, and we shall inevitably do harm rather than good if we attempt it. One thing will always be welcome and admits of universal application. Our addresses at Mothers' Meetings should not fail to contain the note of comfort in them. The joylessness and monotony of life among the poor, especially among poor women, should not be forgotten. We have only to try to realize something of the day's life of a working woman, with husband going to work and coming back at regular times, with children going to and from school and requiring attention, to enable us to see that if we can introduce into their lives a little of the brightness of the glad tidings of the Gospel we shall be doing a very real work for Christ.

V. Evidential Sermons.

This class of sermon will of necessity be only occasionally preached. It appeals to very few, and many of the congregation will probably prefer not to have doubts and difficulties brought before them. Christian evidence work is usually best done in connection with Bible and other similar classes, but from time to time evidential sermons in Church will be of use, if only to show that the preacher is in touch with the times and is not afraid of difficulties. When there is any special outbreak of skepticism, and men are talking on every side about particular books or pamphlets, it is imperative that the preacher should let it be known that he too is considering these problems and is not averse from dealing with them. He must of course be sure of his ground and know his subject thoroughly. It will be fatal if a man endeavour to discuss evidential problems without having given them the attention that they deserve and demand. He must also be sure that he is putting the case with clearness, lest people should get an entirely wrong impression of the aim and purpose of his sermon. There is something much more than mere sarcasm in the remark attributed to the verger of a University Church who had heard all the sermons of the last forty years and thanked God that he was still a Christian. Preachers of evidential sermons must show that they are sympathetic with what is really "honest doubt". There are obvious difficulties in life, problems that are insoluble; and unless the preacher is prepared to show sympathy with these questions, it would be in every way better for him to leave evidential work alone. If, on the other hand, he knows sufficient of his own heart and mind to enter kindly into the difficulties of other men, the fact that he preaches on these subjects will draw men to him and enable them to count him as their friend. The supreme need in every evidential sermon is to link on the subject to personal contact with the living Christ. Discussions of Christian evidences are only too apt to be merely intellectual and abstract; and while the preacher may obtain an intellectual and logical victory and convince the minds of his hearers, he may fail to lead them on to the acceptance of Christ as their Saviour. Christian evidences in the fullest sense of the term are never purely intellectual, and moral and spiritual experience must always be regarded as one of the prime factors of the Christian religion. When, therefore, we feel led to preach on any subject of apologetics, let us beyond all else associate our theme with a personal acceptance of, and adhesion to, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/the-importance-of-preaching-part-2/>

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