

## Expository Preaching.

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The nature of a preacher's pulpit work is determined, largely, by his conception of his mission as a preacher. As he believes his mission as a preacher so will be his preaching.

The writer conceives the preacher's mission to be, to bring a message from God to the people, in such a way as to influence the wills of his hearers in harmony with that message. The preacher finds God's message to all men in the Bible. He must bring this message to bear upon the wills and thus into contact with the lives of the people. His work, in short, is to explain and apply God's message to his hearers. This is just what is involved in.

### EXPOSITORY PREACHING.

The typical form of Expository Preaching is the going through an entire book Sunday after Sunday, e. g. The Epistle to the Galatians. Dr. Alexander McLaren says, "The days for such protracted exposition are, for good or evil, over." But had we such preaching we should have with it a robust type of Christian manhood, with a firmer grip upon our professed creed, than is common today.

Now, what are some of the arguments in favor of Expository Preaching? We have not far to seek for reply. It honors God. It takes the preacher straight to the word of the I Am, for his message. It thus keeps him true to God. It pleases God to convey his message to us in the Scriptures. Let us understand this as sure indication that he would have us draw thence our message to a world of sin in an age of doubt. If it was worth God's while to give us his Book, it is worth our while to toil to fathom its depths, to saturate our thinking and feeling with its truths, and it is our kingly privilege to interpret it to men. We may go to science, history, and ask for our illustrations. We may elaborate our theme with the closest thought, we may adorn it with poetry and imagination, but the subject matter of the Expository Preacher will always be true to the Word. He will never direct his telescope from the heaven of the Word to the earthly level of current topics.

And Expository Preaching has Scripture Precedent in its favor. Nehemiah says, "They read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and they gave the sense," or read with an interpretation, i. e. Exposition. Again, Jesus is in the Synagogue at Nazareth. His fame has reached his old neighbors. They would hear him preach. He reads from prophecy, explains it, and gives its application. We shall do well to do likewise.

Nor would we pass unnoticed the effect of Expository Preaching on the hearers. Their diet during the week has been scraps. Sermons tacked on to snippets of Scripture, the meaning of which is of small consequence, corresponding to the week's desultory reading is not what the people need. Expository Preaching deals with a compact section of the Word. This section cannot be known apart from the circumstances of its utterance. Inquiring minds will search these things. Such preaching therefore incites to a study of Scripture—not an evil in itself.

The application of the truth so as to accomplish its intended purpose is impossible until we understand that truth in all its bearings. Take, for example, the Epistle to the Galatians. Its great theme is, Justification by Faith. You say it is easy to preach and apply that doctrine. Try it. Any adequate interpretation of that epistle will lead far into the Galatia of Paul's day. It takes one to the heart of Judaism. He sees the Jews drawing away the members of the Galatian churches, and laying upon them the heavy yoke of tradition. The preacher lives over again and makes alive to the people the conflict which rent those churches. This goes far into the life of that day. Bone comes to its bone and muscle to its muscle, and the life of the day rises before you. And this is especially true when we deal with an historical book. Thus we learn the messenger's application of his message to his own age, and through that knowledge alone can we draw the proper lesson for our own day. The people are built up in divine truth. Expository Preaching is thus in the highest degree educative.

The Scriptures contain great mountain peaks of truth. These make good texts. We preach from them. We may preach good sermons too. But the "sermon-taster" is there. Comparisons with our predecessors and with every visiting preacher are at once instituted. They have all preached from these star texts. But there are nebular as well as brilliant stars in the firmament of the Word. It is for the preacher to show the stars as suns, the nebular as galaxies of light. He shines as a light who holds forth the Word of Life.

Expository preaching does justice to the more commonplace portions of the Word. It compels the cultivation of the plains and valleys between the mountain peaks. Here we find rich food. Here we discover the background against which to throw the mountains. Who of us has not preached from Gal. 2:20? But how many have led the people through the passages leading up to that life—Christ dealing with the dead works of

the law, and thus given the proper background upon which to cast the great thought of Life in Christ?

This process gives great variety to the preacher's work. A certain preacher on the thirtieth anniversary of his pastorate told his people the pastor's necessity to repeat his sermons. He said there are only about five hundred subjects dealt with in the Bible—fancy Alexander McLaren saying that. Had that pastor been a Biblical student and expository preacher he might have repeated good sermons, but would have given a different reason. The Expository preacher's study is constantly furnishing material for every style of preaching.

Again we are constantly finding in our pastoral work and in our life as citizens, matters demanding delicate treatment. Sometimes it is denunciation, sometimes counsel, sometimes teaching that is needed. Expository preaching will lead the preacher in an easy and natural way to deal with such matters. There is no evil passion with which the Word does not deal. In our exposition we can naturally strike blows with loving severity, and give counsel with sagacious earnestness. And with all the emphasis of God's Word may our blows and counsels be weighted.

There is no such discipline for the preacher as the careful study of the Scripture necessary for Expository Preaching. Patient work with lexicon and concordance yields rich harvests of spiritual discernment, gives such grasp of great principles as nothing else will give, and opens out endless vistas into the deep things of God. The preacher who has steeped himself in the Bible will have a clearness of outlook and a firmness of grasp, which commands the confidence of his hearers. Perpetual freshness will be his for he cannot exhaust the Bible. No other pulpit teaching will last as long as that which is given honestly and persistently to the elucidation and application of Biblical truth.

But all the arguments are not on one side. These are dangers against which we must carefully guard. Lack of unity threatens. Here is a section of Scripture. We wish to do justice to its various parts. Each part may seem to present a distinct theme. We may so treat it as to leave no impression of unity of theme on the mind of the hearer. Our shot may scatter and we kill no game. But anyone familiar with the sermons of F. W. Robertson, R. W. Dale, A. J. F. Behrends, or Joshua Denovan knows right well that this danger may be avoided. Nothing is clearer than the unity of their sermons. Their theme is never thrust into but drawn from their texts.

Again, there is the danger of turning the pulpit into the professor's chair. There is strong temptation to dwell on the setting of a passage instead of preaching the Word. Beware! The preacher is a teacher but he is much more. He is an evangel pointing man to the Lamb of God. He is a prophet bringing God's message to the age in which he lives. It is a message fraught with eternal relations. Let him deliver his God-given message.

And there are qualifications necessary to success in Expository Preaching. First among these stands Faith in the Inspiration of the Scriptures. My brother! If you do not believe the Word to be inspired of God do not try to be an Expository preacher. You may preach to the times. The Bible is for all times. Its messages are immortal. We may not know just how to define inspiration.—Indeed, I am not anxious to know just how God inspired men to write His Word. If I knew today, I fear I should have to find out again next year. But if I am to bring God's message to men lost in sin, beclouded by doubt, smothered in materialism, entombed in indifference, I must have confidence in the Book in which God has written his message. If beside any narrative of the Word you write a "perhaps," if under any of its declarations you place an interrogation point, do not attempt to preach an Expository sermon from that section. Go to the Word with confidence if you would bring therefrom inspiration for those to whom you are sent as a messenger of life. If you doubt the Word the light you bring will be darkness deepened. Great books may be life-teachers. But the greatest life-lessons are written in the Book. With the confidence of a God-sent man, bring a God-given message to a God-needing people. It is this confidence that gives that concentration of purpose; that intensity of conviction; that moral passion; that prophetic fervor; that nobility of speech; that strength and skill of spiritual analysis, which reaches the inmost recesses of the heart, and probes the sensitive secrets of consciences; in a word, that power which moves men's wills to act in harmony with God's message,—a power which is never the preacher's if he doubt the source of his message or accept it as inspired simply because tradition so affirms.

Successful Expository Preaching also demands the power of selection on the part of the preacher. He needs to determine what he can do best, and what the people need most. Can he best set forth the lessons of an historical book, of the psalms, or of an epistle? Has he the historic instinct enabling him to live over the times of Samuel, Ezra, or Luke? Can he resurrect the days of Isaiah with their restless march and counter-march of armed men? Can he realize the exile from which

Ezekiel wrote? Has he the power so to reproduce these times that his hearers may discover the message to those days, and so its application to our own? Or can he most readily deal with biography? Can he analyse motives, passions, purposes, which make life significant? Can he bring to the people the influence of the life depicted? Or is his the power to combine Scripture with Scripture, to draw from epistle or didactic section of history, psalm or prophecy its doctrine, to set it in its true light, combining it with kindred portions of the Word? According to his mental aptitude he will do well or ill along any given line of Expository Preaching.

Then, the preacher must know what his people need. This implies a knowledge of his people,—their life, and lack of life—that he may give to each the portion seasonably needed.

Now for the treatment of the section chosen! This implies skill in analysis and synthesis. The preacher must determine first what the passage contains. His first question is, "What do you mean?" Thus he must discover the dominant thought of the section. That thought is the theme. It is unlawful to thrust a theme into the passage, but it is the preacher's business to examine and analyse the passage until he discovers its dominant. It is easy to discover several thoughts in a passage. It is not so easy to discover the single one from which the several spring. Take I John 3:1-6. It is easy to find a good theme in each sentence. It is a different matter so to weigh and balance the section as to determine its dominant, and discover how it determines the thought of every sentence. But it is only thus that the preacher can determine the content of a section, so as to bring it with confidence to the people. The true preacher will scorn an accommodating interpretation of any section of God's word.

The complement of this process is to discover this truth to the people, making them see and feel the truth he has found. This is the preacher's building process. Here he must care for his perspective. The earth's surface is not a dead level. That were monotony. There are mountain peaks, and elevated plains, and valleys, and open meadows, and here and there a deep canyon. It is so with Scripture. We should preserve this variety of scenery. We need to show the mountain peak piercing the very heavens, and the elevated plains, and the hillsides, and the valley, and the open meadow, and the deep canyon of truth. In no other way may such pleasing variety be maintained.

To all this must be added the capacity and resolution for downright hard work. This is the testing time. If we are to be expositors of God's word, we must be God's workmen, for Expository preaching requires more time in the study, and more prayer for the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit than does any other style of preaching. A young preacher recently said he did not preach Expository sermons because he feared if he did his people would think he was neglecting his study. They probably would—and with good reason. His idea was simply to make running comments on the Scripture—a travesty on preaching.

What is the actual work involved in preparing an Expository sermon. The scrap book does you little service. Thinking power is at a premium over sharp scissors; analysis, over Index Rerum; synthesis, over paste and brush. Here is the process. Your text is before you. Your first work is to find its dominant. This done, you must determine the thought of each statement, you must make the pivot words do their work, you must find the exact meaning and relation of the great words of the passage. Your Hebrew and Greek lexicons and unabridged dictionary here find their use. You must compare the passage in hand with other passages where similar thought is expressed, so that you avoid forcing a thought to its extreme. You should now write a paraphrase of the section. There is no other process by which the preacher so completely masters the section as by making the paraphrase. But this involves work—hard work—the hardest kind of hard work. Translating is child's play to it. But it is as the solid granite foundation to the stately edifice.

You are now ready for building your sermon. Your analysis has been thorough. Your synthesis must be no less so. Perhaps every part taken alone is important. Hence the temptation to make all parts equally prominent in the development. Beware, lest you rob the sermon of unity and so of power. You must now gather the separate thoughts around the two or three main ones whence the others radiate. You have now your plan but only half the work is done. In the development you must get the proper setting. Make the passage live. Under what circumstances was it given? What was its effect? What associations cluster round it? All these, and much more, are to be so used as to make your presentation the most effective possible. And there still remains the question of proportion to be settled. Even now you are only ready to write the sermon.

The Expository Preacher must lay aside all thought of ease in his work. He must lay his foundation deep. He has then to build a structure to the Word. This will tax his power to the utmost. But it pays Life's wonderful achievements come through honest toil. The noblest specimen of the preacher's art is the rightly builded Expository sermon. It is true to the Word and so cannot return void. Some will be helped—some saved—as such a sermon flows warm from the heart of the living preacher. It rightly relates God and duty to human life. It is the most powerful instrument for moulding character entrusted to our use. It is a power to lift the work-a-day world nearer God. It is yours to use if you are willing to pay the price.

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