

## LESSON XXXVI.

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#### THE CONCLUSION: RADICAL ELEMENTS, RECAPITULATION, INFERENCE AND REMARK.

VI. PROCEEDING now to examine more narrowly the compact application at the close of a discourse, we are led to inquire, in the sixth place, "What are the radical elements of a conclusion?"

1st, Ancient oratory recognized two such elements, recapitulation and appeal. Either or both were deemed fitting to popular discourse.

2d, To these two elements of the conclusion the usage of the pulpit adds a third,—inference, or remark. On what grounds has the pulpit originated this feature of applicatory discussion?

(1) The foundation of it lies in the intense practicalness of the work of preaching. Preaching, in the high ideal of it, never discusses truth for the sake of discussion; never illustrates truth for the sake of display: it is aimed at uses. The homiletic instinct is to put it to as large a range of uses as possible. The inference, or remark, is a silent witness, so far as it goes, to the fidelity of the pulpit in reaching after the practical usefulness of preaching.

(2) This is seen in the fact that the use of the inference, or remark, brings to practical bearings a large range of abstract themes which can not be applied in

any other way. The pulpit gives proof of its intellectual dignity in the fact that it discusses themes more profound than secular eloquence ever ventures to produce before a popular audience. They are themes, the practical bearings of which are developed wholly by inferences drawn from them, and remarks suggested by them. In themselves they are aerial in their height above the level of human interests. Note as examples of such elemental themes, the Deity of Christ, the Nature of the Atonement, the Personality of the Holy Spirit. Without these, the gospel is a nullity; yet they reach their practical uses only through inferential processes. In themselves they can be discussed with exactest logic, without touching a conscience, or moving a heart; but, by inference from them, truths of richest and sweetest flavor flow out to every conscience and every heart. Thus treated, the most scholastic doctrines of theology become the most practical.

(3) The inference and remark often aid the usefulness of preaching by exhibiting the practical bearings of truth in climactic order. Truths in a series admit always of climax in impression. The closing paragraphs of a sermon, therefore, often concentrate in a rapid rise of interest the practical uses of an entire discussion. Mental ascent from a lower to a higher level of interest is exhilarating.

(4) The inference and remark are valuable as a device for disclosing the prolific nature of truth in resources of practical application. Force of impression is often gained by multiplicity of points of impression. The great object of preaching is to bring the gospel home to real life by showing at how many points it touches real life. A sense of the omnipresence of truth is thus quickened. Hence the pulpit has by intuition

seized upon the inference and remark as a most natural device of sacred oratory.

(5) Inferences also aid impression by presenting a practical truth through the logical process. A truth inferred is a truth proved. Practical logic is the strongest form of application. Cavil is forestalled by the momentum of argument.

(6) Inferences often assist impression by introducing truth unexpectedly. Hearers concede the process of discussion without foreseeing the results. Says Dr. Emmons, "I usually brought in those truths which are most displeasing to the human heart by way of inference. This I often found to be the best method to silence and convince gainsayers."

(7) Inferences and remarks promote impression by inviting the hearer's participation in the process of application. A truth inferred invites a hearer to perform the process of inference in his own mind. A remark naturally suggested by a subject invites a hearer to test mentally the naturalness of the suggestion. The freedom of the Methodist usage of public worship, which permits the hearer to give vent to his own emotions awakened by the voice of the preacher, has this to say in its defense, that it is grounded in the nature of all eloquence. The reticence of Calvinistic assemblies is so far unnatural in that it stifles the dramatic nature of oral discourse, and tends to reduce it to monologue.

Any thing is valuable, which, without sacrificing a greater good, draws the hearer into the circle of activity in the reception of discourse. Beguile him into the habit of reaching out and taking the truth with his own hand, and you second nature in one of the finest processes of oral speech. Physicians deem it a

vital point gained, if they can induce a patient to cooperate with remedial prescription. Hearers of the gospel are in a state of chronic disease in which their own voluntary participation in redemptive counsel is invaluable. True, at any one moment, in any one given case, the advantage is minute and transient. But the success of all persuasive speech is made up, in the aggregate, of such *minutiae* of moral influence. Truth works upon mind as light works upon vegetation. No analysis can detect the increments of growth; yet without such infinitesimal increments there is no growth.

These are, in brief, the grounds on which the applicatory expedient of the inference and remark rests its claim. The pulpit has in the sheer exercise of good sense originated this device. Whatever may be true of it in secular persuasion, preaching needs it for the full use of its applicatory resources. Of this the almost unanimous usage of the clergy in elaborate discourse is conclusive proof.

VII. Having, then, these three elements of the closing application, — the recapitulation, the inference and remark, and the appeal, — we proceed to inquire, On what principles shall we select and combine the several elements in conclusions?

1st, Study first congruity of conclusion with discussion.

(1) Not all discussions admit of recapitulation. The salient points of a discussion may be so simple and so few, that to recapitulate them would burden them with needless form. Recapitulate a hortatory sermon, and you reduce it to burlesque.

(2) On the same principle, the nature of the discussion may invite or reject the inference and remark.

A subject very prolific of practical bearings may need inferences to develop them. The same is true of suggested remarks which are not logical inferences. Some themes abound with them, others are less fruitful.

(3) Congruity with the discussion will also often determine the question of the use of an appeal. A discussion, which, instead of branching out into logical inferences, like the delta of a river, converges to one burning point of application, may demand the direct appeal as the only natural expression of that application.

(4) All that criticism can say to the point is, Make the conclusion sympathetic with the discussion. Recapitulate, infer, remark, appeal, — one or all, — as may be requisite to evolve most richly the applicatory force which is latent in the body of the sermon.

This study of congruity of conclusion with discussion is especially needful as an offset to the temptation to twist subjects to unnatural uses. The impulse of the homiletic instinct is to use a discussion by applications at all hazards. Therefore a doctrine is sometimes used in ways for which the discussion has made no natural preparation. It is thrust home as if by brute strength. Strict pertinence of conclusion forbids this. It is an artifice. It only conceals one error by another. Pertinence demands more than logical congruity between a discussion and its uses. No matter where the discussion began, it must end with that which is natural to the process which leads to the ending. A scion from a pear-tree, grafted into a quince-stock, fruits into pears, not quinces. So a very abstract discussion develops naturally into a temperate rather than an intense application. Like to like is the law.

2d, Study progress of moral impression. Why is a

hortatory sermon frigid, if ended with inferences? Because an appeal is *per se* more intense than inference. Having exhorted throughout the body of the discourse, it is retrogression to end with any thing else than an appeal. On the same principle, recapitulation may be too cool a process to follow an impassioned argument. The closing division of an argument may be so intensely wrought that immediate appeal derived from that division only may be all that can make a crescent impression.

3d, Study variety of conclusion. The chief peril of the pulpit in applications is monotony of form. Therefore do not always recapitulate, nor always close with inferences, nor always appeal. Never make the pulpit a music-box with only two tunes. Sometimes the most obvious reason for not adopting one method of conclusion in the afternoon is that you did adopt it in the morning. In applications of truth to the conscience and the sensibilities, more than in any other process of discourse, nature craves variety. It will bear a stale subject; for that may be freshened. A hackneyed discussion it will tolerate; for that may be the most truthful discussion. But humdrum in application either indurates or nauseates. What else is so flat as an exhortation which you know by heart? What else is so vapid as any form of practical approach which you have foreseen from the beginning? The moral sensibilities, above all others, demand the stimulus of variety; for they are benumbed by sin, and stagnant under the habit of moral somnolence.

VIII. What qualifications are requisite to a good recapitulation?

1st, The first quality is brevity. The nature of recapitulation implies this: its object requires this. Reca-

pitulation is synopsis. It is the discourse in miniature. Its object is to compress and epitomize, so that the hearer shall feel the whole force of the discussion at a blow. In such a syllabus of the discourse nothing is pertinent which the hearer can not easily carry in his memory.

2d, Restriction to foregoing materials is essential to a perfect recapitulation. Preachers of loose logical habits insert new material into the recapitulation. If not a new division, an appendix to the development of a division is interpolated. Imperfect discussion is thus amended at the close. Ragged argument is patched. Meager illustration is eked out. This is unnatural: rhetorically it is false. Recapitulation is a purely logical process. It gives no room for new material, or a new expansion of the old. It should be conducted with the utmost severity of restriction to the materials already presented.

3d, Perspicuity is an essential qualification of a perfect recapitulation. Not only the clearness of it as a specimen of style, but clearness as a recapitulation, is requisite. It should not possibly be mistaken for new material, or for blundering repetition of the old. The preface which introduces it, the forms of its statement, even the tones of voice in which it is announced, should be such that an attentive hearer can not fail to recognize it for what it is. The whole force of it is obviously lost if it is obscure. The advantage of good divisions in a sermon comes to view in their recapitulation. Clear, compact, forcible divisions fall into line beautifully in an epitome of the discussion. One of the most valuable single rules for constructing divisions is so to frame them that they can be easily and forcibly recapitulated at the close.

4th, Climactic order should characterize the recapitulation. Generally this will be the order of good divisions; but if, for exceptional reasons, it is not, it should be the order in the closing rehearsal. Climax appears grandly in a good synopsis. The rapidity of its utterance, the conciseness of its style, its compact reproduction of the whole discourse in miniature, may disclose the logical energy of the sermon with a concentration and vividness which the discussion did not possess.

5th, The elegance of a recapitulation may often be enhanced by varying the language in which the divisions were stated in the body of the discourse. Variety of style is the natural exponent of mastery of thought. It is especially expressive of ease of thought. Hence it is natural that recapitulation should often vary the forms of the original statement. The extent to which recapitulation may be varied in style is illustrated by the fact that some of our venerable hymns of praise are sermons in miniature. Doddridge often used to compose a hymn made up of the leading thoughts of his sermon, and offer it for "the service of song" at the close. Some of his discourses now exist in no other form than that of hymns for public worship. The hymn commencing, "Jesus, I love thy charming name," is one of those synopses in metre of homiletic discourses.

But this suggests a caution respecting diversity between the forms of divisions and those of the recapitulation. It is that the elegance of variety should never be sought at the expense of perspicuity. The whole force of this expedient of logic depends upon its being seen to be what it is.

6th, In extemporaneous preaching the recapitulation



should be thoroughly committed to memory. This is self-evident; but ridiculous scenes sometimes occur from neglect of it. Especially if the force of recapitulation depends upon the order of climax, a failure of memory is equivalent to a failure of logic. The late Rev. Dr. B—— of Philadelphia once preached an extemporaneous sermon in which he attempted to recapitulate his arguments in the order of climax. He had developed them to his satisfaction in the body of the sermon, and then, by a self-delusion which we can all understand, he assumed that materials which had been so successfully treated would not forsake him, and he remarked with the confidence of assured logic, “We have seen that not only is this true, and that true, and the third, the fourth, the fifth positions also true, but we have seen that it is true that — that — hm — that even — hm” — But it was in vain: the cap of the climax was no longer extant. It had gone the way of the lost arts. His frantic gesture with the whole arm aloft could not rediscover it. How to close that recapitulation was the agony of the moment. “Well, doctor, how did you close it?” his friend inquired. “Oh, I invented some flat piece of impertinence which deceived nobody. My failure was the town talk before night.”

IX. What qualities are requisite to the construction and development of the inference and remark?

Why are these two things classed together? and in what do they differ? Rhetorically they do not differ, and therefore they are classified as one. Logically they differ, and therefore they are not synonyms. Both are rhetorical sequences from the body of the sermon. An inference is a logical sequence: a remark is a suggested sequence. Both are rhetorically related to the discussion as consequent to antecedent. The following principles should regulate them.

1st, They should be *legitimate* sequences from the body of the sermon. The inference should be what it professes to be, — a logical sequence. The remark should be all that it professes to be, — a natural suggestion from the sermon. It is no objection to a remark, that it is not a logical deduction from the discussion, and it should not be introduced as an inference. So of an inference, it is not sufficient that it be suggested naturally by the discussion; and we fall short of its claims if we introduce it as a remark only. Call each by its right name, and make each all that is claimed for it. The late Rev. Dr. Skinner of New York was so exact in his nomenclature, that he would say of a series of applicatory materials at the end, "I shall now close this discourse with a notice of three inferences and one remark." The announcement was needlessly formal; but the distinction was essential.

(1) The excitement of composition easily deceives a preacher respecting the logical and natural relations of his theme. Truths may be associated in his mind by circuitous lines of connection not obvious to hearers: therefore he may remark that in a conclusion which to a hearer may seem to have no legitimate connection with the subject. Some of the inferences of Dr. Dwight have been criticised as illogical; whereas they might stand as remarks, without censure.

(2) Sometimes the legitimate connection of conclusion with subject lies outside of the range of the discussion. The connection may exist; it may be legitimate. The inference may be logical: the remark may be natural. But the discussion may not have established the connection of either. Are such materials legitimate in a conclusion? No. The properties of a hyperbola have a legitimate connection with a cone; but a dis-

cussion of the parabola does not establish that connection. No logical mind, therefore, would discuss the properties of the hyperbola under the head of the parabola. So, in homiletic conclusions, the  *nexus*  of the inference or remark with the subject is not legitimate to the hearer, if it lies outside of the discussion. The hearer has only that to guide him to logical or natural sequences. He can see only straight on. What the preacher may see in secret connection with the subject is nothing to the point. The actual range of the discussion, not the possible range of the subject, governs the hearer's range of thought. He has a right always to presume that a remark or an inference is a result of the discussion. If that presumption is often falsified, confidence in a preacher's logical faculty is impaired.

Let it be observed here, that the authority of the pulpit with hearers depends largely on the reputation which preachers establish for the integrity of their logical power. No other intellectual quality equals this of logical reasoning power in giving to a clergyman the authority which the pulpit needs to make it a power of control. A genius in illustrative power may be very popular as a preacher; but he is never an authority, if his logical faculty is weak.

A young preacher was, not long ago, very flatteringly recommended to the vacant pulpit of a large Presbyterian church in a Western city. The chairman of the committee of supply wrote to inquire about his character when a member of this seminary. "We have heard," wrote the keen judge of good preaching, "that Mr. B. — constructs his sermons by first collecting a number of telling illustrations, and then builds his sermon around them. Is this true? If it is, he is not the man for us." The man in question, it is true, was

noted for his illustrative invention. It was disproportionately developed as related to his reasoning power. Some sagacious hearer had detected the disproportion, and had fastened upon him the label of the criticism I have quoted. It may require years to enable him to outlive it.

Incidental to this topic of the legitimacy of conclusions is the inquiry, "May an inference or remark be derived from only a part of the discussion?" I answer: Yes, if the inference is logical, or the remark natural to a part of the discussion. Sometimes you will discover that every division of the body of a sermon suggests something peculiar to itself in the way of practical observation. The conclusion branches out from them like the spokes from the hub of a wheel, all fitted to the purpose, but no two fastened to the hub at the same point. The perfect use of a discussion may depend on its being applied thus with differences of leverage.

2d, An inference or remark should be *forcibly* deduced from the discussion which precedes it.

(1) Legitimacy of deduction is not the equivalent of force. A perfectly logical inference may be far-fetched: a perfectly natural remark may be feeble. We want the practical results of a discussion in striking lights. A conclusion should be a specialty of the subject. It should, therefore, seize upon the strong points of the discussion, and only those. Inferences and remarks should always be selected materials, never a conglomeration.

(2) This suggests the radical defect of certain conclusions which are otherwise faultless, — that they are not characteristic conclusions. Lord Brougham said of Junius, that his delineations of character were severe,

yet weak, because they were severe abstractions. They would fit one bad man as well as another. They hit nobody, because they hit everybody. They were character, instead of characters. Similar is the defect of certain homiletic applications. In their logic you detect no flaw. Their connections with the subjects in hand you can not pronounce unnatural. You can not say that in themselves they are unimportant. Still, forcible conclusions they are not, because they are not characteristic conclusions. Did a group of Chinese or Japanese faces never impress you with a sense of monotony? They all looked alike. They were individualities like other men; but your unpracticed eye could not see behind the one mask of the national portrait. So homiletic applications impress a hearer who discerns in them no idiosyncrasies created by connection with the subject in hand. They do not grasp the strong points of application, and only those. They might often be interchanged, — the peroration of one discourse for that of another, — and the effect would not be varied. It might be legitimate in both, yet forcible in neither.

An example of this defect, which is met with not infrequently, will illustrate it. You sometimes hear a preacher remark in his conclusion, "We see the importance of meditation on this subject;" and on this inference he proceeds to enlarge. This inference, or its equivalent, introduces the closing appeal in scores of sermons. Yet what force has it? Every subject which is fit for discussion in the pulpit deserves meditation. The inference might be appended to every sermon; but in the large majority of cases it would be nerveless, because it has no individuality. One preacher frequently closed a sermon with the remark, "We see the importance of preaching on this subject." What

force can such a remark have? None, unless the subject be one on which the right or propriety of preaching is doubted. It might properly close a sermon on the Seventh Commandment; but to the vast majority of conclusions it has no forcible because no characteristic pertinence. That you do preach on a subject assumes the importance of doing so. To defend your doing it implies that it needs defense.

(8) Care in selecting forcible materials for inferences and remarks is the more necessary, because many of the most essential applications of truth are derivable from a variety of sources. Conscience, in relation to the applications of the gospel, stands in a center of radiance, like a man in an apartment where light is reflected upon him from a thousand mirrors. The peril of preaching seems, therefore, almost inevitable in the direction of sameness of applicatory remark.

But this is no necessary evil. Every truth has something characteristic in its suggestion of a trite application. It gives to that application something which other truths do not. Every mirror reflects light at its own angle. No two in the thousand are precisely similar. Neither do any two doctrines enforce a duty in precisely the same manner, with the same motives, in the same channel of deduction, by the same proportion of forces, in the same perspective of moral sentiment, as seen by a watching conscience. It is not necessary that a description of a bad man should be true of all bad men. The worth of the soul does not follow from its immortality precisely as it follows from the Atonement. The love of God does not follow from the law of the seasons precisely as it follows from the gift of a Saviour. The duty of repentance is not urged by the doctrine of providence as potently as it is urged by the doctrine of the cross.

(4) Here, then, lies the scope of art in constructing applications by inferences and remarks. It is to make those applications represent, not the sameness, but the diversity, of truth. Effective preaching is very largely the art of putting things. It is not invention nor discovery so much as the apt placing of familiar things. We care little for the genus of any thing. We crave species. We do not admire the genus *flora*: we enjoy elms, maples, lindens, oaks. We feel no sympathy with the genus *homo*: we are moved by men, women, children. So of the applications of all truth. Let them show by logical inference and natural remark whatever is peculiar to the theme, and they can not fail to form a forcible conclusion, if the theme has any force.

(5) Yet it deserves notice that forcibleness of inference and remark is a matter of degrees. Some themes have a more distinctive character than others. The French call a man of marked person and demeanor *distingué*: some homiletic subjects are thus *distingué*. The very mention of them excites curiosity; the discussion of them commands interest; the application of them fascinates the hearer. Such subjects develop into strongly-marked conclusions.

(6) It is a healthful restriction on the topics of the pulpit to rule out subjects which have nothing characteristic in their practical uses. Much that is secular, much that is scholastic, much that is sentimental, much that is feeble is justly excluded from the subjects of sermons, if we compel ourselves to construct them with an eye mainly to the force of conclusions. Work always for results, not for processes; for ends, not for means. So shall we gain the most vigorous processes and the most effective means. A pulpit thus ruled becomes the mouthpiece of only choice thought.