

LESSON NINE

**CHAPTER IX**  
**THE SERMON ITSELF**

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#### B. THE BODY.

This part of a sermon has been called the Plan, or Argument. As such, it implies that much thought and time should be spent upon it. The old adage, "If you think twice before you speak once, you will speak twice the better for it," is truly applicable here. One must be careful, however, lest the plan or argument, however good and important in itself, be made a hobby, and thus become burdensome, hindering rather than helping freeness and enthusiasm in delivery.

#### I. THE NUMBER OF DIVISIONS.

This question has met with varied answers. Even good preachers differ among themselves in this regard, some advocating as many as seven, and others insisting on not more than three headings. It is doubtless true that no one man can be a law unto another in this respect. Each man must find out for himself by experience just how many or how few divisions he can most effectively divide his sermons into so as not to impede ease and freeness. Blind imitation is fatal here.

Such a saying as: "Three heads, like a sermon," indicates that this number has been a generally accepted one. Just why this has been so we may not be able to state, nevertheless, an examination of the sermons of not a few great preachers reveals a preference for this number. The

reason may be found in the fact that three divisions are not burdensome to remember for either preacher or people, they suggest a beginning, a middle, and an end, afford variety, and avoid tediousness. The preacher must not be bound in the matter; he may use as many divisions as the topic calls for, the subject will allow, and that he can handle.

## II. THE NATURE OF THESE DIVISIONS.

### *In general:*

#### 1. They Should Not Be Too Prominent.

The plan or division should not be made too prominent. The pulpit is neither a lecture-room, nor a dissecting room. There is no particular beauty in a skeleton—even though it be a sermon skeleton. The more flesh you can put on it and the less the bony structure can be seen, the more pleasing and inviting will be the sermon.

#### 2. The Divisions Should Set Forth the Subject in a Full, Definite, and Clear Manner.

Particularly should this be the case when the subject is not very clear from the text.

#### 3. The Divisions Should Be Natural and Logical in Their Order and Transition from One to Another.

The negative must come before the positive, and the primary before the secondary. It is not so much a matter of finding a place for the divisions, but of finding the best place for them—that is the important question to settle.

As to whether the outline shall be announced in advance or each point named as it is reached, or whether the divisions should be mentioned from the pulpit at all, is

a question on which there is much difference of opinion. It is, doubtless, very helpful, particularly if the line of thought is somewhat intricate and hard to follow, to draw attention to the divisions as a help to the audience in its attempt to follow the thought of the sermon. On the other hand, some preachers think it takes away from the interest, freshness, and expectancy of the subject if the outline is announced beforehand. The question must be answered by each preacher according as he thinks he is best enabled to effectively present his message. Practice, observation, and inquiry will undoubtedly answer the question in each particular case.

The divisions of a sermon are for the purpose of elaborating and amplifying the subject. This may be done by restating the theme in different words, by detailing general statements, by setting forth abstract facts in concrete terms, and by clarifying the subject by the use of illustrations.

Let us now look at the nature of these divisions.

*In particular:*

**1. The First Division. (I. What?)**

The first division of a sermon should deal with a statement and definition of the subject or proposition. It should answer the question, What? It should occupy itself with definitions, and should afford the preacher the opportunity of stating clearly and unmistakably just what the theme is he is dealing with, and what the particular phase of the doctrine or duty he is inculcating. There should be no misunderstanding of the subject after the first division is thoroughly dealt with. The deck should then be clear for action. It is in a very special sense an address to the intellect as contrasted with that to the emotions or the will.

But how can we answer this sermon question, What? In four ways:

a) *By defining the subject, and the terms of it.*

If, for instance, the theme of the sermon is "Sanctification," then the purpose of the first division should be to define just what is meant by this word. Here one may deal with misunderstood phases of the subject, refute errors, correct erroneous views, and set forth in clear outline just what is meant by the term Sanctification.

The subject may be elucidated by setting forth the synonymous terms in which this doctrine is stated, or by setting forth its relation to the other great doctrines of the Scriptures, such as justification, or regeneration. Here we define clearly the meaning of the words and terms of the theme. This is the part of the sermon in which much use is made of the dictionary and lexicon.

b) *The question, What? may be answered by explanation.*

Ofttimes the text is misunderstood. Take, as an example, 1 Corinthians 2:9: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." How often we hear this verse applied to the future glory of the believer, whereas in point of fact, it has no reference to the future at all, as verse 10 clearly shows: "But God hath (now) revealed them to us by his Spirit." This is what is meant by explanation.

Be sure that what you are seeking to explain is really explainable. It is questionable, to say the least, whether some of the doctrines of the Christian faith are really explainable, e. g., the Trinity, the which is a fact of the Christian faith to be believed, and not a doctrine to be explained. Before undertaking to explain any subject, be sure you understand it yourself. These words of warn-

ing may not be out of place, for more than one preacher has been guilty of the folly of seeking to explain some difficult subject, at the same time manifesting to his audience how totally ignorant he himself was of it.

c) *The question, What? may be answered by relation, the use of comparisons, relations, and contrasts.*

How often Christ defined such terms as "the kingdom of heaven" by likening it to something already familiar to his hearers: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind." The preacher will do well to ask, with the great Teacher, "To what shall I liken" this? In what better way could the doctrine of the imminence of the second coming of Christ have been set forth than by the words, "like a thief"? Preachers make the mistake of not putting enough "likes" in their sermons. To define your subject, therefore, ask yourself to what you should "liken" it.

Or we may seek to show how our subject is related to kindred subjects: e. g., if "Justification" is our theme, we might explain how it is related to sanctification and adoption, for instance.

Or, again, it may be asked, To what does this truth stand in contrast? Scripture makes much use of this method of definition: e. g., sheep and goats, wheat and chaff, light and darkness, godly and ungodly, saint and sinner, life and death. It is said that the negro did not know that he was black until he saw a white man. He learned the truth by contrast.

d) *The question, What? may be answered by the use of illustrations.*

An illustration is to a sermon what a window is to a building—that which lets light in. A house must not be all windows, nor must a sermon be all illustrations. While the power of illustration is subject to abuse, it nevertheless is one of the most effective means for defini-

ing words, terms, or subjects. One must be very sure that the illustration really illustrates. Stained glass windows do not let in much light. The parables of Christ are the illustrations of His subjects. How forcibly the foolishness of the man who hears the word and does not obey it, is set forth by the illustration of the man who built his house upon the sand (Matthew 7). How vividly the folly of riches is set forth by the story of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21).

To sum up then, we may say, that the purpose of the first division of the body or plan of a sermon is to clearly, fully, and lucidly set forth the theme of the sermon by definition, explanation, relation, comparison and contrast, and illustration.

## 2. The Second General Division. (II. Why?)

This division should seek to answer the question, *Why?* that is, it should endeavor to set forth the necessity, reason, or proof of the theme or proposition. If the first division asks, What is the subject? the second asks, Why is it true? Why should I believe it or accept it? How may it be proven? Is it reasonable?

### **PROVING A PROPOSITION. CAUTION AND SUGGESTION.**

All things are not to be taken for granted. The acceptance of some facts rests upon evidence. Christ gave "many infallible proofs" of His resurrection.

Remember that not everything needs to be proven; some facts are self-evident. It is not necessary to attempt to prove to a man who questions it, that the sun exists, for it is a self-evident fact. Nor need we enter into an argument to prove the existence of God. The evidences of His handiwork are too apparent: "The invisible

things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen." "The heavens declare the glory of God." Again, not everything can be proven: the doctrine of the Trinity, for example. Nor must we consider ourselves under obligation to prove a negative. If "the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God," then it is his duty to prove that there is none, and not ours to prove that there is. We should not attempt to prove a thing which we ourselves do not believe to be true or capable of proof. Herein lies one of the serious dangers of accepting, for the purpose of debate, that phase of a subject which we do not believe, nor deem capable of proof. If we are satisfied that a thing is not true, nor capable of proof, then we should not undertake to prove its truthfulness.

Another word by way of suggestion: Begin your argument by using some fact already known to and acknowledged by the hearer. Argue from the known to the unknown. Use familiar arguments. Paul, when arguing with farmers, spoke to them of "fruitful seasons"; but when addressing the Athenian philosophers, he referred them to what their "own poets" had said. The common people heard Christ gladly because He used arguments they could readily understand. It is well for the preacher to rely, as far as possible, upon scriptural arguments, for they are the most convincing.

#### **THE SOURCES OF ARGUMENT:\***

##### *Cause and effect.*

Briefly stated, this means that every effect has some cause. Nothing is without cause. If one is seeking to prove the resurrection of Christ he may use such arguments as the empty grave, the Lord's Day, the Christian Church. These are effects; what are their causes? How did that tomb become empty? What accounts for the

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\*Cf. Broadus' *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*.



change from the Jewish Sabbath to the Christian Lord's Day? What gave rise to the Christian Church? In what great fact did the New Testament have its birth? On what ground has the Christian Church for centuries commemorated the Easter festival? These are effects; what are their causes?

### *Testimony.*

Much use can be made of this method of argument in such texts as: "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" What was the testimony of those who were closest to Him, and who knew Him best? What did His enemies say about Him? What was the testimony of His works?

Effective testimony is said to depend upon three things: First, the character of a witness. Hence lawyers seek to impeach the character of the witness in order that his testimony may have an unfavorable effect upon the jury. A witness whose integrity is beyond question is far more valuable in proving a case than one whose character and reputation are open to suspicion. Secondly, the number of the witnesses. The fact that twenty men witnessed an accident, which they attributed to carelessness on the part of an engineer, is more convincing to a jury than the testimony of but five, or even ten, who testified to the contrary. How does this bear upon the testimony of Christ's resurrection? Was He not "seen of above five hundred brethren at once"? Thirdly, the character of the fact borne witness to. An ordinary fact does not need so great an amount of testimony for its proof as an extraordinary fact does. A supernatural fact needs much stronger evidence for its proof than a natural fact does. The testimony to the supernatural fact of Christ's life received heavenly, that is supernatural witness and testimony (2 Peter 1:16-18).

The testimony of enemies is specially valuable. Hence the testimony of Josephus, Judas Iscariot, Pilate, and demons to Christ's person and work, is exceedingly important.

#### *Authority.*

Foremost in this respect is the authority of the Scriptures. In matters of faith and Christian practice the Bible is the court of final appeal, the ultimate authority. The opinion of scholars, the "generally received opinions of mankind, and the proverbs and maxims which express the collective judgment of many, have a greater or less authority according to the nature of the case. \* \* \* Proverbs, or what the common people call 'old sayings,' are very often, as it has been remarked, but the striking expression of some half truth, or the result of some hasty generalization, and in many cases they can be matched by other sayings to precisely the opposite effect." Great care should, therefore, be exercised in the choice of such authorities, or so-called authoritative sayings.

#### *Induction.*

Induction has been defined as "the process of a general rule from a sufficient number of particular cases. Finding something to be true of certain individual objects, we conclude that the same thing is true of the whole class to which these individuals belong, and afterward prove it to be true of any new object, simply by showing that that object belongs to the same class." This form of argument is said to be the commonest and fraught with the greatest error and danger if not properly used. The greatest care should, therefore, be exercised in its use.

#### *Analogy.*

Logically speaking, an analogy is "a form of reasoning, from the similarity of two or more things in certain particulars, their similarity in other particulars is in-

ferred. Thus, the earth and Mars are both planets, nearly equidistant from the sun, not differing greatly in density, having similar distributions of seas and continents, alike in conditions of humidity, temperature, seasons, day and night, etc., but the earth also supports organic life; hence Mars (probably) supports organic life—is an argument from analogy”—*Century Dictionary*. If men say it would be unjust of God to punish them for violating His law when they did not believe, or did not certainly know, that it was His law, we point them to the fact that this holds true of physical laws—that he who takes poison will be killed, even though he did not know, or did not believe that it was poison. If men object to the doctrine of original sin, as incompatible with divine goodness, we point to inherited disease, inherited proclivities to vice, inherited dishonor.

#### *Deduction.*

Deduction is the inverse process of inferring a particular case from a law of cases presumed to be of like nature; something derived as a result from a known fact; a necessary inference. Suppose we say of a man, “He cannot but take gloomy views of life, because his health is so poor.” Here is involved an argument based on the general assumption that any one whose health is poor must take gloomy views of life—“This invention will not come into extensive use; it is cumbrous, hard to operate, and liable to get out of order.” Here the reasons given all go to ground the assertion, being based on the general truth that any machine that is cumbrous, hard to operate, and liable to get out of order is impaired for extensive use.

#### *Refutation.*

The preacher must “be able with the sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there

are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers \* \* \* whose mouths must be stopped" (Titus 1:9-11). Refuting doubtless comes more easy to men than proving, inasmuch as it is easier to pull down than it is to build up. We must not undertake to refute every objection to the truth. Some objections are not worth refuting. Nor must we create objections for the purpose of refuting them. "Refutation whether of an erroneous proposition, or of an objection to the truth, will be accomplished by showing either that the terms are ambiguous, the premises false, the reasoning unsound, or the conclusion irrelevant. Refutation of an error is sometimes strengthened by showing how the error may have originated. Our Lord made use of this form of argument in Matthew 12:27: "If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out?" In refuting, state the objection fully and fairly so that the hearer will be able to say, "Yes, that is a full and fair statement of the case; if that can be answered satisfactorily, it will help me."

#### *Experience.*

It is to this that Paul appeals in his great argument for the resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15). Says the apostle: "If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins (v. 17)." But the Corinthians knew that they had not believed in vain: they knew, by a very real experience, that they were not still in their sins, for a power, far greater than any human power or self-imposed reformation, and which must therefore have come from the risen Christ, had given them a glorious victory over their previous sinful life. An answered prayer is the best argument for the reality of prayer. It is Christian experience that has saved Christian doctrine, and not vice versa. The strongest argument for the existence of God and the deity of Christ lies in the Christian experience of these facts.

Sometimes the second general division of a sermon occupies itself with showing the *necessity*, or the *reasonableness* of the theme discussed. For illustration of this usage, see the sermon on "The New Birth," and "The Resurrection" (pp. 153 and 151).

### **3. The Third General Division. (III. How?)**

The purpose of this division is to set forth the manner and method by which the theme of the sermon may be brought about, or the conditions under which it may be received or fulfilled. If the theme of discussion is "Regeneration," for example, and the two divisions already dealt with have shown what this doctrine means, and why it is necessary, then the third division shows how it may be brought about: What it is; Why it is; How it takes place.

There are three thoughts usually present in the treatment of this division, namely, the divine agency, or God's part; the human agency, or man's part; the question of means. For illustration, see the outline of the sermon on the "New Birth" (p. 153).

### **4. The Fourth General Division. (IV. What Then?)**

If the first division answers the question, What is it? by explanation; the second, Why is it? by argumentation; the third, How? by what means; the fourth answers the question, What then? by application. What is it? Why is it? How is it? What then?—these, in short, are the four divisions of the body or argument of a sermon. (See sermon outline on "The Resurrection of Christ," p. 151.)

This part of the sermon is by no means to be considered subordinate, or as a mere addition to the composition. Indeed it may be questioned whether the sermon proper

has really begun until the application is reached. The late Charles H. Spurgeon said: "Where the application begins, there the sermon begins." Daniel Webster is reported to have said on one occasion: "When a man preaches to me, I want him to make it a personal matter, a personal matter, a personal matter!" The application is that part of the sermon which more than any other part makes it a personal matter.

Many preachers form the habit of making a practical application after each point in the sermon. This, of course, will have some modifying effect upon this particular division. And yet, it does seem perfectly fitting and natural that there should be a practical application of the whole matter at the conclusion of the sermon. It may be well, therefore, if application is made at the end of each division, not to make it exhaustive, but to leave sufficient to make a fitting close to the sermon.

#### **THE APPLICATION MAY ASSUME VARIOUS FORMS:**

##### *Instruction.*

If, for example, the theme of the sermon is "The Need of Bible Study," then a fitting application would consist in the giving of instruction as to how to proceed to the study of the Bible. In the first part of your sermon you have set forth very clearly just what is meant by Bible study; and in the second, convincing reasons why the Bible should be studied. It seems only natural and proper, therefore, that you should now give instruction as to how this study can be carried on so as to yield the best results. Many a preacher has sent his audience away convinced and longing, but ignorant of the best way, or indeed any way, of satisfying that longing. This is wrong.

*Persuasion.*

Dr. Broadus says: "It is not enough to convince men of truth, nor enough to make them see how it applies to themselves, and how it might be practicable for them to act it out—but we must persuade men." A distinguished minister said that he could never exhort; he could explain and prove what was truth and duty, but then he must leave the people to themselves. The Apostle Paul, however, could not only argue, but could also say, "We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." Do we not well know, from observation and from experience, that a man may see his duty and still neglect it? Have we not often been led by persuasion to do something, good or bad, from which we are shrinking. It is not enough that men *see* the truth, they must be made to *feel* it. Men, usually do not turn from sin simply because they ought to. They must be made to feel the awfulness and the guilt of it before they will turn away from it. In other words, they must be persuaded that it is to their best and eternal interests to forsake sin. Men become wearied of constant exhortations; they must be made to feel.

**ACTION AND EMOTION.**

To this end, therefore, the preacher ought to know *the link which connects action with feeling*. He must study the emotions. The will is not a self-determining factor; it does not act independently of the emotions; it is moved to action by them. Desire naturally prompts volition. We should lay emphasis on a careful study of motives. "Reason, reason, as much as you like; but beware of thinking that it answers for everything. This mother loves her child; will reason comfort her? Does cool reason control the inspired poet, the heroic warrior, the lover? Reason guides but a small part of man, and

that the least interesting. The rest obeys feeling, true or false; and passion, good or bad."—*Abbe Roux*. If the preacher is deficient in this power, he ought to cultivate it; if excessive, restrain it. He ought to study some authoritative work on the subject.

### IMPELLING MOTIVES.

Particular attention ought also to be paid to the motives that lead men to action. The preacher should be a master in handling them. "Impelling motives," says Professor A. E. Phillips, in his work, *Effective Speaking*, "may be defined as man's spiritual, intellectual, moral and material wants. For working purposes they may be given the following classification: Self-preservation, property, power, reputation, affection, sentiments, tastes. The distinction between these impelling motives, and the manner of their application may be seen best, perhaps, by an example. Let us suppose the purpose is to have the listener lead a temperate life. The argument, in outline, might consist of the entire Seven Impelling Motives, after the manner following:

*Theme:* You should be temperate in all things—because you will be better off from the following viewpoints:

*Self-Preservation.* You will have better health and a longer life.

*Property.* You will earn more and save more.

*Power.* You will have greater mental force, greater moral power, greater self-control. You will do more yourself and exert greater power over others.

*Reputation.* Your friends and acquaintances will admire you, hold you in higher esteem.

*Affections.* You will avoid wounding the feelings of those you love; your companionship will give them



greater pleasure. You will be able to be of more use to them.

*Sentiments.* You will prove yourself a man. You will show self-respect. It is right to be temperate.

*Tastes.* You will increase both your opportunity and your ability to appreciate the best in art, literature, drama.

If, then, we are seeking action so frequently, and, if, further, action is the result of the superiority of the impelling motives over the restraining motives, it is plain that the more we bring these impelling motives to bear upon a given audience or person, the more likely will we attain our end. Therefore, it is of the greatest importance that we master their ready use."

The preacher, of course, dealing as he does with eternal issues, will deal with the spiritual and eternal phases of these "impelling motives." Under "self-preservation" he will deal not merely with "better health and a longer life" here, but with the eternal life of the ages to come. Under "reputation" he will speak not only of the admiration of friends and acquaintances, but, what is infinitely more important—the esteem and approval of God.