

BIBLE PREACHING

By Peter Wiseman

God has designed through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe; but that preaching which saves, however foolish it may appear, is not foolish preaching—it is Bible preaching, in harmony with Paul's admonition to Timothy, "Preach the Word." We read a good deal in homiletics about the Textual, Expository, and Topical sermons; and, under the last-mentioned, the Ethical, the Doctrinal, the Historic, the Biographical, and the Evangelistic; but we have often desired to read something about a Bible sermon independent of any homiletical classification. In this article we express our wish and opinion without attempting to settle the matter.

When we pray, we talk to God; when we read His Word, He talks to us; but the sermon is God's message from His Word through man to man. In some degree, at least, then, every sermon should have a three-fold appeal: An appeal to the mind (the intellectual), an appeal to the sensibilities (the emotional), an appeal to the will (the volitional). This should be the case whatever the homiletical classification or category of the sermon, and it is more important than the classification or category. For instance, if the sermon is an appeal to the mind, without stirring the emotions or sensibilities, and moving the will, it must fail accordingly. It will result in cold, dead intellectualism. If it is an appeal to the emotions merely without informing the mind and moving the will, it will mean the emotions running off with the will without any intellectual reason and conscious or reasonable decision. If the ethical sermon is an appeal to the will (call it the rational will if you desire) without an appeal to the emotional nature and the intellectual, it will not produce much ethical conduct. In the different sermons there may be an appeal centering in one physical aspect more than the others; but it is equally true that to succeed there must be an appeal to all: The mind informed by the great truths received, the emotions stirred by them, and the will moved or persuaded to decide accordingly. This task is not an easy one, for the simple reason that there are those who desire information without action; those who desire their emotions stirred ("Tickle me, please")—and there are many in this category; those (and few they are) who desire to have their wills moved to religious decision.

There is the grave danger today of placing emphasis on that which the hearers want rather than on what they need; the danger of spread rather than depth; the danger of empty shallowness rather than deep spirituality; the danger of show before man rather than depth and spirituality which would please God—a shallow frothy saying of nothing rather than God's great truth as revealed in His Book. How sad in the light of the Scriptures which says, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

The great theme of Christianity is "Christ crucified." There are, however, many subjects; but whatever the subject, the preaching material should come from the Word of God, for we are to preach that Word. In it, of course, will be revealed the Incarnate Word and the many great and glorious redemptive truths designed to save—truths which are doctrinal. This is why the Bible preaching is doctrinal preaching. Phillips Brooks, in his lec-

tures to divinity students at Yale, said: "The truth is, no preaching ever had any strong power which was not the preaching of doctrine. The preachers who have moved and held men have always preached doctrine. No exhortation to a good life which does not put behind it some truth as deep as eternity can seize and hold the conscience. Preach it always, not that men may believe it, but that they may be saved by believing it." In this connection read Rev. John Wesley's sermons and notice the great Bible truths as formed into Christian doctrine poured out through them. Take his definition of regeneration and realize the Bible study involved therein. "It is," said Rev. John Wesley; "that great change which God works in the soul when He brings it into life; when He raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is a change wrought in the whole soul by the Almighty Spirit of God when it is created anew in Christ Jesus; when the love of the world is changed into the love of God; pride, into humility; passion into meekness; hatred, envy, malice into a sincere, disinterested love for all mankind."

The preacher who makes the Bible the most important and the most used Book in his library, who has a Christian experience which harmonizes with the Bible, will naturally become a Bible preacher. His preaching material is from that source—the Word. That does not mean, however, that the Bible will be the only Book, but it will mean, as already expressed, that it will be "the most important and the most-used Book in his library." In this sense he will become a man of one Book, and from this glorious source will come his sermon material, illustrated from other sources according to his range of reading.

The order of development and arrangement of the sermon is largely with the man himself. Having settled on the text, he will consult the context, for a text without the context is said to be a pretext; then the original meaning, so far as possible; then parallel passages of Scripture; and then, the arrangement for delivery. This last demands much thought and study. The preacher's personal approach and personality will enter here, but it will be to please the Lord, and the great objective will not be out of sight—the salvation of souls and edification of believers. May we venture an illustration: The preacher may ask himself the question, "How shall I divide the text so that my hearers may follow and receive help and benefit?" That is a natural question. He may follow this order: The text is found in Hebrews 2:11, "For both he that sanctifieth, and they who are sanctified, are all of one." He may follow this order and develop a Bible message. First, the Sanctifier, "He that sanctifieth." At once he is under obligation to talk about the Sanctifier, Jesus Christ. John 3:16 and Hebrews 13:12 may come under discussion. The ability of the Sanctifier to sanctify may come under discussion and be proved from what He has done. Second, the Sanctified. "They who are sanctified." Under this division one may discuss the people in question, designated elsewhere as "the people." John 17 would make a nice parallel Scripture as to the qualifications required for sanctification. Third, the Sameness, "They are all of one." The development here may well commence with our Lord's own words, "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us, that the world may believe" (John 17)—oneness like

that which exists between the Father and the Son! Well, ponder the statement and see. The field here is challenging: The Vine and the branches; the building with Christ the chief cornerstone; the church the body of Christ, Christ the head; the church made up of the various members of the body; the fact of organism. Then there is the truth of participation in His holiness; the fact of Christ the Bridegroom and the church the bride.

The aforementioned illustration may be called a textual sermon because in homiletics a textual sermon is one in which the text furnishes not only the theme but the main divisions in the treatment of it; but in a full development of such a subject, as has been suggested, it may develop to be an expository sermon rather than a textual. Perhaps it could be called a textual expository sermon, if there is such a creature in the homiletical zoo. What matters anyway? It is a Bible sermon!

The preacher who would preach the Word must develop Bible readings and expository messages. This will lead surely to Bible preaching, and will lead away from the religious shallowness of the present-day preaching—a shallowness which may and should be viewed as alarming in spiritual movements. A minister who has no Bible readings, no expository messages, to give the people of God is a pathetic spectacle in the Christian ministry! The only cure is Bible study and more Bible study. Prayer and the Word of God is the way out. Why not try to purchase a copy of Bible Books Outlined, by Dr. A. E. Harris; a less expensive little work by the writer, just off the press, may help—Studies in the Sacred Scriptures. The Analyzed Bible, three volumes (Introductory), by G. Campbell Morgan, would be most valuable. It might be obtainable through a secondhand bookstore. We would recommend to the young preacher to take his Bible, select a book which has a real challenge to him, read it, then reread it, then attempt a division of it, noting the possibilities in it of Bible readings and clusters of passages together which may offer material for an expository message. Much earnest prayer and hard work will have their reward.

YOU TELL ON YOURSELF . . .

You tell what you are by friends you seek,
By the very manner in which you speak,
By the way you employ your leisure time,
By the use you make of dollar and dime.

You tell what you are by things you wear,
By the spirit in which your burdens bear,
By the kind of things at which you laugh,
By the records you play on the phonograph.

You tell what you are by the ways you walk,
By the things of which you delight to talk,
By the manner in which you bear defeat,
By so simple a thing as how you eat.

By books you choose from a well-filled shelf,
In these ways and more you tell on yourself.
So there's really not a particle of sense
In an effort to keep up a false pretense.

—The Lighted Pathway

If the devil cannot beat you in prayer, he cannot beat you anywhere.

—PAUL RADER.