


THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A SERMON

- HOMILETICS PERSPECTIVES; HERMENEUTICAL DIRECTIVES

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- The word “**sermon**” has its origins in a Latin word which means a “**stab**” or “**thrust**”
- The purpose of the sermon is to pierce the hearer with the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God – Eph.6:17
- Sample Definitions of a Sermon:
 - a. ‘A form of discourse on Scripture truth, designed to save or edify the hearer’
 - b. ‘A speech spoken in behalf of or in the name of God
 - c. ‘That which is born of the union of truth wedded to knowledge, matured in meditation and sent forth, clothed in the beauty of diction
 - d. ‘An oral address to a general audience, with a view to unfolding, elaborating and enforcing scriptural truth’
 - e. ‘An oral address to the popular mind, upon scriptural truth in the Bible, elaborately treated and with a view to persuasion’



Five issues emerge from above:

i. It is an oral or spoken address:

– not something to be read by an audience but heard by it.
This then necessitates that it be spoken sufficiently loud and enunciated so clearly that all can hear distinctly [Neh.8:8]

ii. It is to the popular mind:

- Thus it should be couched in language which can be understood by all

iii. It is upon Scriptural truth contained in the Bible:

- It is always good to remember that the preacher has not been sent to reconstruct society, but to regenerate it, and this can only be accomplished through the preaching of the living word
- Preaching is the setting forth of scriptural truth before the hearer and this demands, of course, that the preacher be well acquainted with the holy scriptures



iv. **It is elaborately treated:**

- That is to say, scriptural truth is closely examined in relation to its context, the passage is carefully analysed, the real meaning of its words explained, its truth illustrated and the lesson applied in a logical, intelligent and edifying manner.
- All this necessitates close and connected study, an orderly arrangement of the material and a clear presentation of the address

- Three things are essential for this elaborate presentation, namely
 - a. Rhetoric - which has to do with the use we make of the material, its choice, adaptation, arrangement and expression. i.e. putting the right words in the right places. It is the art of discourse and skill in the use of language
 - b. Grammar – this has to do with the choice and use we make of the words that form the medium by which the sermon is preached, and also to the correct use and pronunciation of these words
 - c. Logic – is concerned with the right use of thought and of the rational powers. The arguments used must be based on good and sound reasoning, which proceeds, in orderly sequence, from less to greater, until the hearer has been convinced of the reasonableness and logic of the argument



v. It is with a view to persuasion:

- The supreme goal of the preacher is to gain the attention and win the hearer to an acceptance of, and obedience to the truth that has been presented; not merely almost persuaded but altogether persuaded to accept the truth [Acts 26: 26 – 28]
- However eloquent, logical and orderly the sermon, it has missed its mark if it fails to move the audience for God. To preach is to so present the truth so that it will reach each person in the audience



Building Blocks – Structure of a Sermon

A sermon has been likened to a bridge which spans the gulf that separates ignorance from knowledge; indifference from interest; unbelief from faith, and inaction from decision

It is the preacher's business to bridge this gulf by means of his sermon and conduct the hearer safely across

The approach to the bridge, on the hearer's side – **the Introduction**

The **body** of the sermon or the **discussion** constitute the main structure of the bridge with each division as a supporting column

The nearer side of the bridge being the **conclusion**

It goes without saying then that a service with such exalted a purpose demands the best we can give by way of careful preparation of the material and powerful presentation of the truth to the audience



Properly speaking , there are **five** parts to a sermon:

1. **The Text** – the portion of scripture to be considered
2. **The Theme** – i.e. the subject to be discussed
3. **The Introduction**
4. **The Discussion** – or the body of the address, consisting of the main divisions or points
5. **The Conclusion**



1. The Text:


Latin derivation from **Textus**, meaning something, woven.

The text may consist of a single verse or even part of a verse, or a whole passage consisting of many verses

The text then becomes our authority, of the foundation on which the sermón is built.

Why the necessity for a Text?

- a. It gives authority to the message – “Thus saith the Lord”. The audience is made to realize that it is the truth of God’s Word, and not vaporings of man that is being listened to
- b. It confines or should confine the preacher to the subject at hand. Disciplines the preacher from taking a text, then departing from it and never returning to it!
- c. It gives unity to the Sermon, presenting a complete thought that can be retained. The sermón exists only for the text, with the preacher’s business being to press it home to the hearts of the audience
- d. It prepares the audience for the discussion that is to follow. The text is what a brief is to the Lawyer: it is the basis of the argument for him to succinctly state the brief to the judge and the proceeding to prove his statement convincingly to win the case
- e. It promotes variety in preaching – There is no lack of texts, each of which has its own message addressed to the heart of man



Selection of the Text:

- a. Be careful about choosing texts the sentiments of which is not inspired
- b. Texts on the whole, should express a complete thought
- c. Avoid as a rule, the use of odd texts
- d. Be careful about texts that promise a great effort we cannot fulfil in the sermon
- e. Do not be afraid to choose familiar texts
- f. The Text should be selected with one's audience in mind



3. Interpretation of the Text:

This is the most important part of the sermon!

Interpretation means 'the process of ascertaining the mind of the writer'. Once this has been discovered, the interpretation will be clear.

A sermon may be homiletically correct, but if its interpretation is wrong not only is it a failure, but it becomes a menace to the hearer

The preacher must beware of 'handling the word of God deceitfully' - [2 Cor. 4:2]

In engaging with interpretation of the text, distinction needs to be made between **exegesis** and **exposition**

a. Exegesis – refers to the discovery of the material. Origins in Greek meaning to **lead** and **guide**. Exegesis draws out hidden meaning

b. Exposition – Latin origins with a meaning of **placing out** or **display**. Exposition places hidden meaning out in logical, appropriate and effective order

Jeff Ray clarifies this by saying - 'Exegesis is the task of the commentator; exposition is the task of the preacher'



a. The Text should be interpreted honestly:

This is to say, credit should be given to the writer by not detracting from the original meaning

b. The text should be interpreted in the light of its context:

By this is meant what precedes and succeeds the text under consideration. In this regard, Wycliffe 'the father of the British reformation' has this to say "It shall greatly help to understand scripture if though mark, not by what is spoken or written, but of whom, to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, and with what circumstances, considering what goes before and what follow"

c. The Text should be interpreted in the light of its language:

Consideration given to Grammar and the meaning of English Words

d. The text should be interpreted in the light of Biblical History, manners, customs and geography



CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS:

Preparation of a Sermon

a. Necessity for Such:

i. It is essential – It goes without saying that if preaching is to be what God intends it should be; then there must be time set apart for serious and honest preparation

Preachers are both **born** and **made**, both **gifted** and **developed**. The developing process represents a life time of conscientious study and application to 'the ministry he has received in the lord'- [Col. 4:17]

This involves a great amount of labour. Study is work and the preacher must ever remember he is a 'workman' for God. This labour of love will pay great dividends one day and, in the meanwhile, will bring multiplied blessing to both preacher and hearer

ii. It is Scriptural – In this preparation the preacher is but following in the steps of heralds who have gone before and whose faith follow



SELECTION OF THE SUBJECT:

- a. There must be definite and earnest prayer for Divine wisdom and guidance
 - i. It should be done humbly – “without me you can do nothing”; As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me”. There is no room for pride in the service of the Lord
 - ii. It should be done believingly – God has promised to give wisdom to the one who asks in faith, not wavering [Jas. 1:5 -6]
 - iii. It should be done conscientiously
 - iv. It should be done perseveringly