

## CHAPTER VI.

THE INTRODUCTION AND THE CONCLUSION.-  
THE INTRODUCTION.

We have already stated that sermons are usually divided into three parts: the Introduction, the Discussion or body of the sermon, and the Conclusion or application. What has been said heretofore relates chiefly to the subject-matter in the Discussion, and the other two parts remain to be considered. Of these we take up now the Introduction.

1. **Its meaning and purpose.** The first part of the sermon is called the Introduction. The Latin word *Exordium* is sometimes used. Its purpose is the same as the preface to a book, and is intended to introduce the text or topic of the sermon to the favorable attention of the congregation.

2. **Its importance.** Much depends on how a man begins anything he undertakes. The proverb that a "bad beginning makes a good ending," is seldom verified in actual experience. Ground lost in the beginning is seldom recovered-and a battle begun in a blunder generally ends in defeat. First impressions are lasting, and it is of great importance in preaching, both for the truth's sake and for the preacher's sake, that these be favorable. Not only should we be careful in the start to avoid arousing any feeling of aver-

sion or hostility against ourselves or our theme, but we should study how best to introduce our subject so as to gain the attention, interest, and sympathy of the audience. If these are gained at the beginning, they may readily be held to the close.

3. **The material.** Whatever helps to *introduce* the text or topic of discourse is proper material for the Introduction. Whatever helps the hearers to understand the surroundings, circumstances, or bearings of the text; or the reason why that particular topic was chosen for the occasion, is not only appropriate, but useful and often essential in beginning a sermon.

We give the following points and suggestions concerning the material of the Introduction:

(a.) An Introduction should **never be an apology**. If the apology that you are poorly prepared be true, it is a shame; if false, it is a sin. If you are poorly prepared the congregation will find it out without being told; and if they do not, why should you debase yourself before them? They have a right to expect an educated and earnest pastor will always be able to preach to edification, even if he has been hindered in his preparation. To begin with an apology in the expectation of making a deeper impression, is to be untruthful and deceitful.

(b.) The Introduction should **not be a part of the discussion** which belongs to the body of the discourse, except it be intended simply to arouse interest in the subject.

(c.) It may be **explanatory** of the words of

the text when necessary. Criticism of the translation and quotations of the original should seldom be made, and never unless some important truth is thereby brought out. It looks like a pretentious parade of learning which the true scholar always avoids. But where an unusual, difficult, or obsolete word or phrase occurs in the text, it is of advantage to have its meaning made plain before the general discussion begins.

(d.) When the text is part of a narrative no better introduction can be made than to tell the story of which it is a part, describing especially its time, locality, persons, and circumstances. This forms an easy and interesting introduction, and secures attention from the start. Care must be taken not to prolong the narrative, but sketch only its leading and important features.

(e.) An account of the Author or a description of the Book from which the text is taken, especially of writers and books not often referred to, will form interesting and instructive material for the Introduction.

(f.) Good introductions may sometimes be made by giving the reasons which influence us in selecting the text. It gains attention to know the preacher has a special message—a special object or purpose in his sermon, just as it does to tell a man at once *why* you call to see him.

Such reason may be because the text is taken from the Gospel or Epistle for that day, or was suggested by the particular season of the church-year. Or it may be because something has occurred in the congregation or commu-

nity which makes the text or topic specially appropriate at that time, or has aroused public interest in some doctrine or duty; or the prevailing indifference to such doctrine or duty requires its presentation. In any such or similar event it is sometimes well to state in the introduction the facts which thus decided the choice of the subject.

#### 4. **General rules concerning Introductions.**

(a.) **Not every sermon** needs an Introduction. Sometimes it is well to enter at once on the discussion without preliminary remarks.

(b.) Introductions should **be brief**. People want the preacher to get to the main part of the sermon as soon as possible, and it is a great fault to weary them in the beginning. If the material is very abundant it is better to put some of it in the body of the sermon than to make the Introduction too long. It is the first course of the feast, and should whet the appetite but not satisfy it.

(c.) They should be **simple, easy, and natural**. They should not demand too much thought nor excite too much wonder. Begin with modesty of language and demeanor if you wish to win your way to the hearts of your hearers. Do not start off with a skyrocket nor begin on a high pitch either in matter or manner. Introductions of sermons, like that of friends, should be made in plain language and natural manner.

(d.) The Introduction should be **well studied** and thought out, and expressed in short and suggestive sentences. This needs special

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attention when the sermon is not written. Rambling, confused, and ungrammatical sentences at the beginning will not only make an unfavorable impression on the congregation, but will be a discouragement and hinderance to the preacher himself. Some happy mode of expression and literary elegance will have the opposite effect and give flavor and favor to the entire sermon.

(e.) It is a good rule to leave the preparation of the Introduction until the body of the sermon is completed, as it is best to build the porch after the house is finished. This avoids putting in the Introduction what is already in the discussion, and the mind can best judge, after the other parts are completed, what sort of introduction the sermon ought to have.

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1. Its meaning. The word Conclusion has two meanings-to come to an end, and to bring the mind to a decision. The Conclusion of a sermon therefore refers not only to its closing sentences, but especially to its application to the congregation, so as to produce in them the intended results. It is the place in the sermon where the rays are brought to a focus and made to burn. It is a distinct part of the discourse,-the peroration of the ancients, and the *Schtussrede* of the Germans.

2. Its importance. All that was said about the importance of the Introduction will apply with greater force to the Conclusion. While the saying "All's well that ends well" may be an overstatement, it expresses a truth our ob-

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ervation and experience will justify. Luther places among the qualities of a good preacher that he ought to know when to stop.

Too many preachers neglect the preparation of this part of their sermons, trusting to the enthusiasm the delivery of the body of the sermon will excite in their minds, to carry them safely to the end. The result is they are weakest where they ought to be strongest.

In the great orations which have come down to us from antiquity, the most impressive thought and language was reserved for the close, and the same plan is pursued to-day by the best speakers in legislative halls and in courts of law. If statesmen and lawyers find this the best way to make their speeches move men to action, surely preachers of the gospel should be equally wise.

That the conclusion is a very important part of the sermon is evident not only because it makes the last impression on the congregation, but because it is the summing up and gathering together of all parts of the sermon for practical effect. The aim and purpose of the preacher must be effected here. There is no use in gathering hammer and nails if they are never driven in. To fail here, may be to fail altogether.

### **3. Conclusions may have different forms.**

(a.) That of **inferences or lessons.** Where the sermon is doctrinal, historical, or philosophical it is customary to conclude with several inferences drawn from the subject or its discussion, or the practical lessons the **subject** suggests. Where this is done they should

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be few in number and striking in form, so as to make and leave a vivid impression upon the minds and hearts of the hearers. Sometimes it is well to precede them with a brief recapitulation of the points or heads of the sermon, but the conclusion should consist in proper lessons or real inferences, and not be merely the heads of the discourse repeated.

Examples: If Ps. xlv: 1 be used for a Reformation sermon, showing what God accomplished through Luther and his associates, the following inferences would form a good conclusion:

1. Let us appreciate their work. 2. Let us be true to their work. 3- Let us carry on their work.

John x: 9. "I am the door," etc.

Concluding lessons- 1. That door is now open. 2. Some day it will be shut.

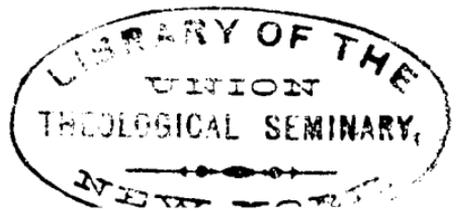
Luke xiv: 21. "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor," etc.

Inferences- 1. There are many in the church who ought to "go out." 2. There are more outside who ought to come in.

John viii : 36. "If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Lessons- 1. Gain this liberty. 2. Keep this liberty. 3. Use your liberty.

(b.) That of application. By application is meant the showing in the conclusion of the sermon, how and to whom the various truths or facts discussed and presented are to be applied for practical effect. Such application should never be personal, *i.e.*, directed to any



particular individual, but should be addressed to the several classes of persons present, or to the particular time, condition, and needs of the congregation or community.

The application need not always be kept for the conclusion, but can sometimes be made with great effect in the discussion as the points arise. Generally, however, it is the best to reserve it until the discussion or general presentation has been completed. While never personal, the application should always be particular and practical.

Examples: Rom. v: 1. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God," etc.

Let us apply this:

1. To those who have found peace.
2. To those who are seeking peace.
3. To those who remain at enmity with Him.

Luke xiv: 28. "Which of you intending to build a tower," etc.

Good inferences here would be :

1. Count the cost before you begin.
2. Pay the cost and begin at once.

But an application would be :

1. To those who began but abandoned the work.
2. To those just beginning.
3. To those who never commenced.

Rev. xxii: 13. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end," etc.

Apply this:

1. To those to whom Jesus is Alpha but not Omega.
2. To those to whom He is not even Alpha.

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(c.) That of **exhortation, entreaty, or appeal.**

The conclusion of a sermon is the proper place for an appeal to the hearts and consciences of the hearers. If the design of preaching is not only to proclaim the Gospel but to persuade men to accept it and to comply with its terms, there should be an appeal in every sermon. "To beseech men by the mercies of God," is the highest motive and also the most effectual mode in winning souls to Christ.

But it needs to be wisely done or it may become the weakest part of the discourse. A desultory exhortation, without plan, point, or precision will spoil the sermon and leave an unfavorable impression. It may surrender the fort after it has been taken. It will be like building a house with strong walls and then covering them with loose boards instead of a compact and symmetrical roof.

Nor should this form of conclusion ever degenerate into mere coaxing or threatening, but be manly, persuasive, and sincere. It should be the point where the preacher appears at his best as the ambassador of Christ and the messenger of God.

This form of entreaty or appeal is only another way of putting or expressing the lessons, inferences, or points of application. Instead of inferring, *e.g.*, that men ought to hear the gospel, heed the gospel, and help the gospel—the preacher will appeal to them to do it. He will appeal to men's heads, their hearts, and their hands. He will appeal by the mercies of God and by the destiny of men; by the song of the saved and the wail of the lost.

The design of the Introduction of a sermon is to arrest attention and excite interest in the subject; that of the Discussion is to inform and instruct the mind; but that of the Conclusion is to affect the heart, which can best be done by entreaty and appeal.

#### 4. General rules for Conclusions.

(a.) Conclusions should not be "stereotyped." Some preachers always close in the same way, and often with the same set phrases. This should be avoided. Variety can be gained by employing the different modes at different times. The nature of the theme will decide which mode is best. If every sermon is closed with a thrilling appeal, the appeal will soon fail to thrill.

(b.) They should be short. When you reach the conclusion, the congregation will expect you to conclude. Appeals to the feelings especially should be in few words, as its power is lost when the appeal is prolonged. Avoid the phrases "lastly," "finally," "in conclusion," "one more remark," etc., especially their repetition. If the conclusion has various parts, it is best not to enumerate them, except when they are in the form of inferences or lessons.

Very frequently the last division of the sermon is the *practical* view of the subject, *i.e.*, the practical application of the topic discussed. In such cases especially there is no need for further lessons or applications; all that is necessary in the conclusion is to bring the sermon to a graceful and impressive close. We give an example of this from Reinhard. After he had finished his third division, which was

of a practical sort, he concluded a sermon with these words: "Oh! that to this end God would make us feel, my dear brethren, the power of the Gospel of Jesus; that by this gospel He would purify, strengthen, and elevate your mind, and give you that seriousness, that wisdom, and that dignity which ought to distinguish the disciples of His Son. To Him, with His Son and the Holy Spirit, be glory forever. Amen." Such brief *votum* or prayer would fittingly form the best conclusion for many sermons.

(c.) Their style should **be tranquil and tender.**

While uttered with deep emotion and often soaring to sublimity of thought and expression, the Conclusion should not be violent in gesture nor boisterous in tone. The stream of eloquence should not end in the roar of a cataract. An abrupt termination rarely leaves a good impression. The hearers should be brought into that frame of mind which fits them to receive "the peace of God" with which the sermon closes.

¶ I(d.) Much depends on **the way in which the Conclusion concludes.** The last thought and sentence should be well chosen and expressed. Some striking and appropriate incident from history or of recent occurrence, is very forcible. Some apt quotation either of prose or poetry leaves a pleasing impression. If the poetry be a familiar hymn, not the whole of it, but a passage only should be used.

Best of all, is it to close with the text itself, or some other appropriate passage of Scripture, like one of the following'

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"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

"Wherefore, comfort one another with these words."

"Now the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us; unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

"Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever. Amen."

Thus the sermon begins and closes with God's Word, and the line of the discourse forms a circle, and is complete. The last thought should be hopeful, bearing the hearers toward if not into heaven.

The last word should be a noun or other important word, and one on which the voice of the preacher and the ear of the hearer can rest.