

LESSON 11

THE STYLE OF THE SERMON

In preaching, style is the characteristic way the preacher expresses himself, the manner in which he makes known his thoughts. In actuality, style is the man, for what he speaks and how he acts in the delivery of a sermon is an expression of his very being. Jesus said, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt. 12:34). The style of the sermon involves the way the preacher organizes his message, arranges his thoughts, and uses words and figures of speech. In sermon delivery, style includes his use of voice and actions in the act of speaking. The main qualities of style are clarity, energy, and elegance.

The Quality of Clarity

The most important quality of sermon style is clarity or clearness of expression. Clarity in preaching is speaking in a plain and distinct manner so that the hearers understand clearly what the preacher is saying. It means speaking in such a way that no listener misunderstands. The preacher must make himself transparently clear to a wide range of people of every age, of both sexes, of varied backgrounds, of various degrees of intellect, of different levels of religious knowledge, and often of different races. Thus, he must understand clearly the concepts that he is to proclaim and the language that he speaks and understand the people that he is addressing. The Lord Jesus, the master preacher, serves as the preacher's model for speaking with clarity and being clearly understood.

Clarity of style depends first of all on the choice of expressions. The preacher must choose words, phrases, and figures of speech in the language of the people, the language of everyday life. Significantly, the New Testament was written in the koine Greek, the common Greek, the universal language of the Roman world. The preacher should use plain and distinct expressions and interesting, suggestive, and lively terms. Words of Anglo-Saxon origin are usually simpler and better understood than words of Latin origin. He should use familiar rather than unfamiliar terms, concrete rather than abstract terms, and specific rather than general terms. He should avoid foreign expressions and professional and theological terms, which are often not understood

*The characteristic way the preacher expresses himself is his \_\_\_\_\_ in preaching.*

*The three main qualities of style are \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.*

*(style, clarity, energy, elegance)*

*The most important quality of sermon style is \_\_\_\_\_.*

*Clarity is speaking in a plain and distinct manner so that the \_\_\_\_\_ understand clearly.*

*What three things must a preacher understand well in order to be able to communicate his message to a wide variety of people?*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*(clarity, hearers, (1)the concepts he is to proclaim, (2)the language he speaks, (3)the people he is addressing)*

*What is the first important basis for clarity?*

*(choice of expressions)*

by many people, words such as revelation, incarnation, atonement, and regeneration and even such familiar words as grace, righteousness, and holy. The preacher should be careful to explain theological terms from time to time if it is necessary to use them. He should understand and use if possible the idioms of a particular people or congregation, that is; the dialect or language peculiar to a particular community or class of people. Words and expressions often have different meanings, several meanings, various shades of meaning, or no meaning for various people.

Clarity also depends on the structure of sentences. Generally, the preacher should prefer the short, simple sentence over the long, complex sentence. He should use strong and lively declarative sentences that are closely knit rather than loosely arranged. He should arrange sentences with active and suggestive nouns and verbs and suggestive and striking adjectives, participles, gerunds, phrases, and clauses. He should use parallel construction in his sentences, often using a series of expressions for repetition or emphasis. He may use series of parallel expressions as in the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3-11). Variety in sentence structure helps to eliminate monotony and to sustain interest.

Moreover, clarity depends on the construction of paragraphs. The paragraph represents the unit of thought in actual delivery. The primary need is unity of thought in the paragraph. The opening sentence should indicate clearly and concisely the subject to be discussed. The sentences following should be related to the opening sentence to eliminate digression. Connectives such as "and", "but", "also", "furthermore," and "for example" help tie sentences together in a paragraph. Series of statements and parallel construction of sentences help unify the thought. However, the preacher should use expression also in paragraph construction. He should guard against using lengthy paragraphs since the attention span of most people is rather short, possibly one to two minutes. A one hundred word paragraph takes about one minute to deliver at average rate of delivery of one hundred words per minute. However, the preacher should vary the length of paragraphs from two or three sentences to seven or eight sentences to avoid monotony. But the overriding factor is logical arrangement to provide clarity of thought. The closing sentence should be a strong statement, often a summary of the thought discussed or a brief application to the hearers.

Clarity also depends on \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_.

(sentence structure)

What is the primary need in a paragraph?  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(unity of thought)

The Quality of Energy

The quality of energy is a necessity for effective preaching, exemplified by the preaching of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, and the apostles. This quality includes liveliness, forcefulness, power, and emotion. It involves the very nature of the preacher, the message that he proclaims, and the way that he delivers the message. The quality of energy comes basically from an energetic nature involving the preacher's determined purpose, his vigorous thought, and his compassionate feeling. Peter revealed his determination to preach the Gospel before the Jewish leaders, saying, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20) and "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Paul told the young preacher Timothy to be vigorous and diligent regarding the Word of God, saying, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing [properly presenting] the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians about compassion for service, saying that the life of Christ constraineth (compels or urges) us to live for Him who died for us (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15).

Energy in preaching also comes from the power of the message of the preacher. The Gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16), wrote the Apostle Paul. Furthermore, he said, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5). The preacher then must know the great truths of the Gospel and understand its power to save.

In addition, the quality of energy involves the force of expression in preaching, that is, the forceful way the preacher expresses himself. This involves his choice of terms. The words that contribute to clarity also provide force in preaching, that is, plain, lively, strong, specific, concrete, and active words. It also includes force of statements, that is, brief, strong, terse sentences that begin and end with important words and include active verbs, familiar and concrete nouns, and suggestive adjectives and adverbs. The brief sentences should be interspersed with longer sentences with parallel construction and series of expressions that emphasize important points. Repetition also adds force in preaching. Often certain truths need to be said over and over again in a different way to create an impact on the hearers. The preacher should guard against monotony by rephrasing sentences, restating expressions, using synonyms, and illustrating the subject in various ways. Figures of speech

Four characteristics of the quality of energy are: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

The quality of energy comes basically from an energetic \_\_\_\_\_ involving the preacher's determined \_\_\_\_\_, vigorous \_\_\_\_\_, and compassionate \_\_\_\_\_.

(liveliness, forcefulness, power, emotion, nature, purpose, thought, feeling)

The power of the message of Christ also provides \_\_\_\_\_ in preaching.

(energy)

The quality of energy involves the \_\_\_\_\_ by the preacher.

(force of expression)

add force to statements, including similes (Matt. 23:27), metaphors (John 6:48), comparisons (Matt. 6:28-29), and hyperboles (John 21:25). This also includes exclamation, which is a statement of outcry or a striking expression (Matt. 23:13); dramatization, which is a dramatic presentation or lifelike portrayal of events (Mal. 3:1-6); interrogation, which is the use of rhetorical questions and answers (Luke 6:32-34); and personification, which is representing things and ideas as persons (Prov. 1:20-23).

But most of all, energy of style comes from the power of the Spirit. The energetic nature of the preacher has its source in the Holy Spirit who motivates him and empowers him to proclaim the Gospel with conviction. The power of the message as expressed by the preacher is made possible through the work of the Spirit who makes it effective in the lives of hearers. The Apostle Paul, an orator of outstanding ability, could have declared the testimony of God with excellency of speech and wisdom, but refused to do so, saying to the Corinthians, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing [persuasive] words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4-5). He preached in the power of the Spirit so that the faith of his hearers would be in the power of God. The preacher, like every other Christian, is sealed with the Holy Spirit at his conversion, but he needs the infilling of the Spirit for power and service. This power was first manifested by the Church on the day of Pentecost. The disciples were filled with the Spirit that day and began to speak of the wonderful works of God as the Spirit gave them ability (Acts 2:4, 11). The Spirit Himself is the power, and He gave the apostles the zeal, the boldness, the compassion, and the power to preach with effectiveness so that multitudes were saved during those decades following Pentecost. The preacher especially must heed this command, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). An energetic style is assured, marked by these evidences as indicated in the Book of Acts: power, zeal, boldness, compassion, and effectiveness in preaching.

The infilling of the Holy Spirit comes through a willingness of the preacher to be used as a powerful instrument of the Spirit in the proclamation of the Word of God. He must believe in the need and the possibility of being filled with the Spirit for service. He must make the decision to offer himself wholly unto God for this service (Rom. 12:1) and to present a clean vessel unto Him by confession of all sins (1 John 1:9). He must then pray for the Spirit to come in power (Acts 4:31; Luke 11:13). After he is empowered for service he must do the will of God by proclaiming the Word of God at every opportunity (Acts 4:20, 31, 33; 8:4).

*Most of all, energy of style comes from the*

*Evidences of an energetic style as shown in Acts are: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ in preaching.*

*(power of the Spirit, power, zeal, boldness, compassion, effectiveness)*

*A preacher can be filled with the Holy Spirit through his \_\_\_\_\_ to be used as an instrument to proclaim God's Word.*

*(willingness)*

## The Quality of Elegance

Elegance of style is that quality of preaching which conveys to the hearers a sense of pleasantness, harmony, and beauty. In sermon building and delivery, the laws of good taste and refinement need to be observed. Grammatical errors and stylistic blemishes should be eliminated and crude combinations of words and harsh and disparaging sounds avoided unless they serve in some way to portray forcefully some truth, such as the perils of evil or the consequence of sin. Elegance depends on the proper use of expressions and the orderly arrangement of statements so that those factors that contribute to clarity and energy also contribute to elegance of style. This quality comes from simplicity of style out of a natural flow of words, a certain easy movement, and a beauty of plain and forceful expressions. Elegance should not be an end in itself, but should be subordinate to clarity and energy. Thus, the preacher should avoid using expressions for ornamentation or statements that call attention to themselves. Paul refused to preach to the Corinthians "with excellency of speech and wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1), so that their faith would not stand in the wisdom of men. But to the learned Athenians he spoke with a certain eloquence in order to reach them with the Gospel (Acts 17:22-31). Thus, the preacher should strive for clarity and energy of style in preaching, but observe the principles of good grammar and refined style in speaking.

The quality of elegance comes from a proper choice of terms. Words aptly chosen add beauty to a sermon, such as simple and lively words and phrases and appropriate figures of speech, especially similes, metaphors, and comparisons. Vulgar words should be avoided. A certain refinement comes from a careful arrangement of statements in outlining, sentence structure, and paragraph construction. There is beauty in simplicity of construction and in natural flowing expressions of thought. The use of poetry adds to beauty as that revealed in the Psalms and in hymn books. Familiar hymns especially contribute to the quality of elegance. Ordinarily poetry should be used sparingly and should be quoted in an appropriate way. Quotations of prose from good literature and from outstanding men contribute to refinement in style. Paul quoted a statement from one of the Greek poets in his sermon on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17:28). Certain special techniques add to elegance of style, such as, alliteration, the use of the same first letter or sound for a group of words or outline points; parallelism, an expression of the same thought in different ways in a statement (Ps. 12:1); antithesis, an expression of two contrasting thoughts in a statement; an acrostic, an arrangement in which the first letters of several

Elegance of style conveys to the hearers a sense of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

(pleasantness, harmony, beauty)

What are five sources of the quality of elegance?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

(Compare your answers with the text.)

words form a word, as ASK from the words ask, seek, and knock in Luke 11:9.

### The Improvement of Style

The preacher needs to develop his own style to such a point that he says what he means and that people understand clearly what he says. He can improve his style first of all by studying language, especially his own language. Formal study of English grammar and composition can help immeasurably, but continued self study of English is also valuable through the use of a dictionary, through the utilization of a grammar, and through the reading of articles and books relating to speech, composition, and style. The study of other languages such as Latin, Greek, and German is also profitable. The preacher can also improve his style by studying literature. By reading good English and American literature he can gain knowledge of language as it is used in proper form and in good taste. He should also read good newspapers and magazines to balance his study between the language of literary works and the language of everyday life. Moreover, he can improve style by listening to outstanding preachers. He should observe and study the manner in which they speak in person and on recordings and the way that they deliver their messages. The study of their sermons can also be of profit. The observation of other types of outstanding public speakers provides insights regarding matters of style also. Style can be developed by the practice of writing which helps to make his speaking more exact. He should practice organizing his sermons using the most appropriate terms, phrasing expressions properly, and constructing sentences and paragraphs carefully. The use of a dictionary and a thesaurus is most helpful in the use of words and expressions. He should then practice writing out his messages and rewriting them continually until he is able to say precisely and concisely the truths that he wants to convey. Finally and most importantly, the preacher can improve his style by continued and careful practice in preaching. He can practice with a recorder and listen to his own message, noting mistakes and making changes before they become a habit. He could ask his wife or a friend to observe his delivery of sermons and make constructive criticisms. The preacher learns by doing through his failures and successes in the delivery of his sermons.

A preacher can improve his style by studying

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
and by practicing \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

(language, literature, writing, preaching)

## The Use of Imagination

Imagination is the power of creating mental images of things seen by the mind. It is forming mental representations of objects in their entirety not previously grasped by the senses nor established by reason. It is not fancy or fantasy, which is the invention of the novel or unreal, but rather the perception of new ideas based on facts from experience. Imagination is used in various aspects of sermon building, such as arrangement of outlines, invention of materials, development of messages, expression of thoughts, portrayal of what Scripture reveals, and reconstruction of historical events. In conceptual imagination ideas are clothed in familiar and suggestive imagery as in arranging and developing sermons. In historical imagination scenes are pictured based on facts already expressed through documents, experience, observation, and perception. For example, from the facts revealed in Scripture the preacher could reconstruct a historical event or depict an eternal truth through imagination. In sympathetic imagination the preacher through his own experiences can identify with others and understand their problems in a process called empathy. This is an imaginative projection of one person into the experience of another. It especially makes preaching interesting, relevant, and challenging. For instance, Ezekiel was made to experience the captivity of the children of Israel, and he expressed his experience thusly, "I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days" (Ezek. 3:15).

Almost all people have some degree of imagination which can be developed for creative and constructive use. In his use of imagination the preacher should first begin with facts, making certain of their truth, and then study the background information available so that he can reconstruct scenes and depict events. He should then meditate on these facts, attempting to gain a mental picture of the incidents. In the process of developing images he should keep close to people for sympathetic imagination. He should keep close to the Lord, the source of spiritual insight, revelation, and vision. This comes through a study of Scripture and through prayer and meditation. He should study nature, art, literature, and science in the development of imagination, especially poetry, drama, fiction, painting, and music. He should practice continually by contemplating on ideas and recreating scenes in his own mind and then portraying them in preaching with word pictures.

*The power of creating mental images of things seen by the mind is \_\_\_\_\_.*

*List the various aspects of sermon building in which imagination is used.*

1. Arrangement of \_\_\_\_\_
2. Invention of \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ of messages
4. \_\_\_\_\_ of thoughts
5. \_\_\_\_\_ of what Scripture reveals
6. Reconstruction of \_\_\_\_\_

*(imagination, outlines, materials, development, expression, portrayal, historical events)*

## The Use of Humor

Humor in preaching is any expression, saying, or passage of a sermon that provokes smiles or laughter. It includes witty remarks, clever sayings, jokes, puns, funny stories, amusing incidents, irony, and satire. Some people object to humor because they believe that preaching is too serious for it, or that it would be sacrilegious, or that it distracts from the message or from truth. Others believe that humor is useful in preaching to gain attention and create interest, to rest a congregation in long discussions, to weaken opponents' arguments, to strike home a point, or to emphasize a truth. It has been helpful to break down prejudices and inhibitions and to handle certain difficult or delicate problems.

In the use of humor the preacher should not attempt to be funny if he is not so inclined. However, most preachers have some talent which can be developed through practice and use. The preacher should learn to laugh at himself and to take joking from others. He should use humor in the sermon appropriately, sometimes in the introduction and at times in various parts of the body of the sermon, but never in the conclusion or invitation. He should never use humor for its own sake, but should use it in good taste and in fitting with the audience.

Humor in preaching includes \_\_\_\_\_  
remarks, \_\_\_\_\_ sayings, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ stories, \_\_\_\_\_  
incidents, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.  
Some advantages in the use of humor in preaching are  
to gain \_\_\_\_\_, create \_\_\_\_\_,  
rest a \_\_\_\_\_, weaken opponents'  
\_\_\_\_\_, strike home a \_\_\_\_\_, or  
to emphasize a \_\_\_\_\_.  
  
(witty, clever, jokes, puns, funny, amusing, irony,  
satire, attention, interest, congregation, arguments,  
point, truth)

## Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2 and 3):

1. What is meant by style in preaching? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Name the three main qualities of style. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the most important quality of style? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is clarity of style? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. On what does clarity of style depend? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. What does the quality of energy include? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. From what four sources does the quality of energy come? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. The basic quality of an energetic nature involves what? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. The preacher and his message actually depend on the \_\_\_\_\_  
for spiritual power.
10. The infilling of the Spirit comes through what? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. What does elegance of style convey to the hearers? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. The quality of elegance comes from what five sources? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. How may a preacher improve his style? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. What is imagination? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. How is imagination used in sermon building? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. What does humor include? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. What are the advantages of the use of humor? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3):

Read Chapter VII, pages 138-163 of the textbook.

1. Explain the importance of style.
2. According to the textbook, how may clarity be obtained?
3. Explain how clarity may be obtained through language.
4. How can an interesting style be attained?
5. Explain how a forceful style may be acquired.
6. Explain the two ways suggested by the text to develop an effective style.

Advanced activity (Level 3):

1. Explain what the textbook means by preaching as oral communication with a complex audience and with this generation.
2. Outline the suggested order for finishing a sermon as given in the textbook.
3. What are the advantages of writing out a sermon in full?

Seminar Discussion

1. Discuss the nature and importance of the qualities of style.
2. Why is it important to have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in preaching?
3. Discuss the ways that have been effective in improving sermon style.