

LESSON 2

THE PASTOR'S SERMON PREPARATION

Introduction

Several lessons in the study guide on Sermon Building are devoted to the preparation of sermons. No attempt will be made in this lesson to go into the detailed process of building a sermon; however, a summary review should be helpful. It will be necessary for the student to refer back to Sermon Building for the review of details.

The last lesson described the task of preaching as "the interpretation, communication, and application of biblical truth to human needs." The simplified approach to constructing sermons in this lesson will be based on this description. The purpose of this lesson is to focus attention on the exact task of the preacher. The more detailed homiletical principles set forth in the previous course should not be forgotten or ignored, for they help to give variety, freshness, and clarity to preaching.

Selecting a Subject

The Bible is the best source for sermon subjects

Since the Bible is the Word of God expressed in the words of men and addressed to the needs of men, it is the most valuable and relevant source for sermon subjects and content. It is authoritative because it is the Word of God. Since God is man's Creator, His Word is binding and carries ultimate meaning for sinful and mortal man.

In recent years, many preachers have turned to psychology, philosophy, and science for subjects to discuss from the pulpit. While these disciplines contribute much to man's life, they have nothing to say about his need of forgiveness and reconciliation to a loving Father and man's eternal existence. Philosophy may speak of man's destiny, but its statements are based on the unstable rational conclusions of man. Man's rational nature is influenced by his environmental circumstances and his personal desires. The Bible as revelation from God contains truth which is enduring and ultimate. A message based on biblical revelation carries the words of eternal life. A sermon on psychology or philosophy deals with theory and speculation.

What is the best source of sermon materials?

Fill in the "abc's" of why the Bible is the best source. The Word of God is--

a _____ and

b _____, and it

c _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The theories of science and philosophy

_____, but the Word of God _____.

(change, endures)

There is no way of proving that the Bible is revelation from God; however, supporting evidence points to God as the author of it. Accepting the Bible as authoritative is an act of faith and not a matter of scientific proof. Since the "proven theories" of science have changed radically during the past 25 years, it is fortunate that man's confidence in the Bible is not based on "scientific proof." The Bible as divine revelation has withstood fierce attacks from many directions during its existence of nearly 2,000 years. The Bible has outlived those who attacked it as well as the theories on which the attacks were based. It has proven itself to be the enduring and dependable Word of God.

Some theologians have concluded that, since the Bible was written during a time of a vastly different world view, its message is irrelevant today. Actually, the message of the Bible concerns man and his relationship to God. Of course, it is expressed in the framework of a pre-scientific world view, but its eternal message is not limited to the first century world view. Man has not changed in his basic nature of dependence and sinfulness. Neither has God changed as a loving and forgiving father. Even though modern, scientific man has made tremendous progress in conquering space, death continues to defeat him. Only Jesus Christ has conquered death and time. Man's ultimate needs remain the same even though his environment has changed. The Bible remains as relevant today as it was in the day of its writing.

Since the Bible is the Word of God which speaks to man's ultimate needs, it should be the primary source of subject and content for sermons. The preacher needs imagination in seeing how a passage of Scripture applies to man's ultimate needs and how biblical truth can be communicated to man so he will understand it in his present environmental situation.

Human needs may suggest sermon subjects

Sometimes a sermon subject is brought to the mind of the preacher as he observes a serious need of his fellow-man. The need points him to a Scripture which contains an answer for people in that particular situation. For example, the death of a loved one gives rise to the need of a fuller understanding of hope in Christ. While a pastor was away completing his seminary studies, a faithful member of his church died unexpectedly of a heart attack. The wife informed her pastor of the death of her husband but insisted that he not come for the funeral. She explained that the pastor's recent sermons on the subjects of death and the experiences beyond death had increased her faith and would give her support and comfort during the funeral service.

Is this statement true or false?

Accepting the Bible as authoritative is an act of faith as well as a matter of scientific proof. _____

(false)

The message of the Bible is as relevant today as when it was written because:

- 1. Man has not changed in his basic nature of _____ and _____.*
- 2. God has not changed as a _____ and _____ father.*

(dependence, sinfulness, loving, forgiving)

A biblical sermon may result as a human need points the preacher to a _____ which contains an answer for people in that particular situation.

(Scripture)

The pastor's own needs may suggest sermon subjects

Frequently, the preacher becomes aware of the need of preaching on a particular subject by analysing his own needs. He faces the temptations, doubts, anxieties, disappointments, victories, and devotional needs of his people. When he discovers in reading his Bible a thought which is significant to his own life, usually he can be sure that it will be significant to the lives of others. As the preacher searches for sermon subjects, he should remind himself often that the task of preaching is "the interpretation, communication, and application of biblical truth to human needs."

Salvation and Christian growth are basic needs

Spiritual needs can be classified in two general categories: the need for salvation and the need to grow in faith. Evangelization is man's primary need until he receives Christ as Saviour. After his conversion, the rest of his life is characterized by needs related to Christian growth. Since the majority of those who attend preaching services are Christians, needs related to Christian growth far outnumber those related to evangelization.

Christian growth is based on proper attitudes, understanding, and motivation. Doctrinal sermons concerning the nature of God and the teachings of Christ should meet the need for understanding. Ethical sermons are doctrinal to the extent that they include teachings concerning what is right and wrong, but they must also appeal to the motive for doing right. Devotional sermons appeal to the attitudes and feelings. Their purpose is to guide the attitude of the hearer to gratitude and rejoicing for God's goodness, grace, and love. A person may understand already God's love and grace, but pressing responsibilities in daily life draw his attention away from God. Devotional sermons redirect man's attention from the world to God and stir up his emotion of gratitude.

Sermons of consecration appeal to man's commitment to God's service on the basis of his gratitude to God. Man needs to make decisions which are commitments to live for God and to do His will. God's will includes every aspect of man's life; his vocation, his home, his worship, his daily service. Supportive sermons strengthen those who face crises in life and give hope and direction to man in his daily struggles. They deal with the meaning of death, affliction, sorrow, and defeats. Promotional sermons should be related closely to sermons of consecration. They relate to the programme of a church. Any function worthy of being part of a church's programme should contribute to the work of the Kingdom.

Unscramble the letters to make a word for both blanks in the statement below.

tifiscignan

When a pastor discovers in reading the Bible a thought which is _____ to his own life, usually it will be _____ to others.

(significant)

Read all of this page before doing the exercise below.

Can you name six classifications for sermons related to Christian growth? Try it.

1. D _____
2. E _____
3. D _____
4. C _____
5. S _____
6. P _____

(Compare your list with the text.)

More specific subjects relating to these six kinds of sermons will be discussed in subsequent lessons. It is sufficient at this point to note that they point to a variety of urgent needs on the part of those who attend preaching services.

When lost people are present in the service, an evangelistic sermon is appropriate. Evangelistic sermons can also have benefit for the Christians by challenging them to witness and by strengthening their understanding of the doctrines of salvation.

Selecting a Text

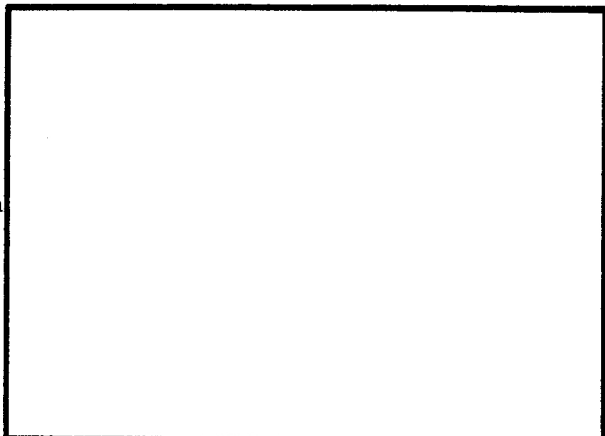
Sermons differ from other speeches because their subjects are based on biblical texts. The word "text" comes from *textus* (Latin) which means fabric. A text is a part of God's Word which is woven into a sermon. Sometimes a text that will meet a need of the people becomes apparent during the preacher's devotional reading. At other times, a pressing question arising out of the needs of the people will force the preacher to search the Scriptures for an answer. Challenges to faith require answers in sermons which are based on sound interpretation of the Scripture.

The text should fit the subject

The preacher must avoid twisting the meaning of Scripture and using it as a proof text to support his position. He should approach the Bible with respect, honesty, and openness. If careful exegesis does not render from the text information which supports his subject, misinterpreting the text is not the solution. For example, if the preacher is speaking against the use of alcoholic beverages, he is not exegetically correct in denying that the wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee (John 2:3ff.) or that commended by Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:23) was fermented. However, he is correct in pointing out that the change in social conditions must be considered in the interpretation and application of those Scriptures. Fermentation was essential for preserving the juice from grapes, which were basic to the diet of people. A better text supporting the position of abstinence from intoxicating beverages would be Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 8. Paul concluded that Christian love and Christ's death were nullified by actions which hindered a weaker brother.

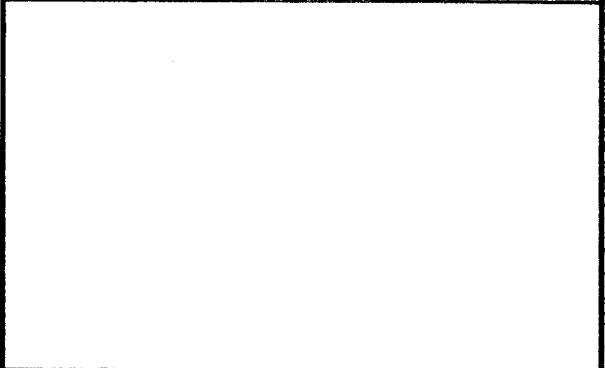
Scriptural units should be regarded

In selecting the text, the structural units of the Bible should be taken into consideration. Using fragments of Scripture to prove points does injustice to the Bible. It is easy to take a phrase of Scripture out of



A text may be selected (1) during the pastor's d _____ r _____ or
 (2) as a result of his searching the S _____ to find answers to people's needs.
 (devotional reading, Scripture)

The preacher must avoid _____ the meaning of Scripture to support his _____.
 (twisting, position)



Is this statement true or false?
 The preacher must not use fragments of Scripture to prove points. _____ (See text.)

its context to support a statement which is not true to the meaning of the full text. To disregard the sentence structure also can lead to abusive use of Scripture. For example, to quote only part of Ephesians 4:28 could result in the following: "Let him that stole steal..." No preacher would go to this extent in distorting the meaning of Scripture; however, careless biblical use has resulted in numerous serious distortions.

The misinterpretation of Isaiah 14:12-15 is an example of taking phrases of Scripture out of their context. The passage mentions *Helal* which was translated in the Vulgate (Latin Bible) as "Lucifer." The prophet's purpose was to show how the Babylonian king, who had exalted himself because of pride, would be brought to the dust of the earth. In his pride, he made himself like the Most High, but his actual weakness would be revealed when he was cast down into Sheol where his bed would be maggots and worms. Former earthly leaders, who were defeated by the Babylonian monarch, would be surprised that one who had appeared so strong would become as weak as they. To illustrate the pride and fall of the Babylonian king, the prophet used a mythological story from Canaanite religion. Part of the myth has been recovered in the Ras Shamra fragments. The story tells how a minor Canaanite deity, *Helal ben Shahar* (Day Star, son of the dawn) sought to ascend to the heavens to sit in the midst of the assembly of gods in the far north. He made himself like *Elyon* (most high), the chief god in the Canaanite pantheon. The pride of Helal was exposed and he was cast down from the heavens to the depths of Sheol.

When the passage regarding Lucifer was read by early Christians, it was taken out of its context and interpreted in the light of Luke 10:18: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Careless interpretation gave the new concept that the fall of Helal (Lucifer) in Isaiah 14:12 refers to a prehistoric fall of Satan (the prince of demons). This interpretation has been used to explain the origin of Satan. Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* also popularized the interpretation, and it continues to be held by many. Such errors of interpretation are avoided when the literary unit of Scripture is interpreted as a whole. Jesus' statement ("I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven") had reference to His power over and defeat of Satan and his kingdom in Jesus' own day.

Interpreting the Text

Scripture is not easy to interpret and apply to the contemporary situation because it was written to people of a different thought pattern and culture. Faithfulness in exegesis requires that the preacher

Disregard of sentence structure can lead to abusive use of _____.

(Scripture)

How can errors of interpretation be avoided?

(By interpreting a literary unit of Scripture as a whole)

first discover what a text meant to the original recipients and how they would have understood it in their environmental circumstances. After seeing what it meant to them, the interpreter is better prepared to understand its meaning in relation to people today.

In order to know what the biblical passage meant to the original recipients, the interpreter must know the historical background and the environmental setting. These factors do not have to be explained to his audience, but a correct application requires that he understand the background of the Scripture. A classic example is the washing of the feet of the disciples by Jesus and His instruction for them to do the same for one another (John 13). Since social conditions have changed, footwashing today would have the opposite effect to that of the same activity in the day of Jesus. For the household slave to wash the feet of tired, dusty, and hot travellers was an act of hospitality which brought comfort to the guest in the home. To instruct guests in our homes today to remove their shoes in order that their feet might be washed would result in embarrassment. It is not inconsistent to observe the Lord's Supper as an ordinance because Jesus commanded it and not to observe the washing of feet, which was also commanded. The distinction between the two is based on the meaning of the two commands in the first and twentieth centuries. The observance of the Lord's Supper can continue to fulfil its original intention without degenerating into a legalistic ritual which has lost its meaning. To recognize the washing of feet as an ordinance would be to perpetuate a legalistic ritual which would not have the same meaning now as it did in the day of Jesus.

Knowing the historical circumstances requires the interpreter to know who spoke and what conditions brought forth those particular words. If the Scripture relates to a historical event, it must be recognized that the event was interpreted theologically by the prophet. David was described as one who walked after God with all of his heart and one who kept the commandments of the Lord (1 Kings 14:8). The description appears inaccurate in the light of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband; however, the apparent contradiction is solved when the statement is interpreted in its historical setting. David was faithful to worship only Yahweh, and he did not turn aside to other gods. Loyalty to only one God was not true of David's successors. Interpreting Scripture in its historical setting requires a knowledge of the social, religious, and political circumstances of the time.

The language of the Scriptures should be examined carefully. Up-to-date commentaries are helpful, especially if they explain words in the light of recent archaeological findings. The writer's theology, ideas, and style need to be considered in order to

In the light of their historical backgrounds, which of the two commandments of Jesus, listed below, has as much meaning today as in the first century? Underline your answer.

1. Washing feet
2. The Lord's Supper

(2)

Five facts of historical background which are necessary in interpreting Scripture are:

1. The person who _____;
2. Conditions which brought forth the _____;
3. _____ circumstances;
4. _____ atmosphere;
5. _____ environment.

(spoke, words, social, religious, political)

understand his writings. A misunderstanding of Paul's use of the word "law" and his doctrine of justification by faith could lead to antinomianism (disregard of moral law).

A full discussion of hermeneutics is impossible at this point, but such a discussion can be found in The Bible and Its Interpretation.

Selecting a Title

The title is a brief description, in seven words or less, of the specific content of the sermon. It can be put in the form of a question, a phrase, or a sentence. It will usually require a noun accompanied by limiting adjectives. The noun refers to the general subject, but the qualifying adjectives designate particular aspects of the broader subject.

Limiting the subject by the title

General subjects such as love, grace, Christ, God, and salvation are too general to discuss in one sermon. Descriptive adjectives or identifying prepositional phrases give direction and limit the general subject. Under the general title of love, the preacher could wander from the love of God, God as love, God's love for man, man's love for man, man's love for God, brotherly love, sacrificial love, and motherly love. Such an array of subjects would be too much for one sermon. The preacher can find adequate material to speak on only one phase of love at a time. For example, he might choose to speak on what the Cross reveals about divine love, how God loves, or the faithfulness of motherly love. The particular title chosen should be determined by the text and the purpose for which the sermon is being prepared.

An analysis of John 3:16 can lead to slight variations in titles, depending on the purpose of the sermon; but the subject is God's love for sinful man. A biographical sermon on the life of Mary might be used on Mother's Day with the title, "The Faithfulness of a Loving Mother." Although little is said of Mary after the birth accounts of Jesus, she was present at the foot of the cross when her Son died (John 19:25-27). Only the deep love of a mother could have emboldened her to stand near her Son who was being crucified like an enemy of the state. Jesus' brothers are not mentioned as being present. It is interesting that Jesus committed His mother to the "beloved disciple," who took her into his own home (John 19:27).

Fill in the correct number.

A sermon title is a brief description, in _____ words or less, of the specific content of the sermon.

(Compare your answer with the text.)

To give direction and to limit general subjects such as love, grace, Christ, or God, descriptive _____ or identifying _____ phrases are used.

(adjectives, prepositional)

Using good taste in selecting a title

The title should be interesting but not sensational. Sensational subjects are often irreverent and distract from the truth attempting to be communicated. They tend to cause the hearers to take a light attitude towards the content of the sermon. Some examples of sensational titles are:

- "The Sex Life of Samson"
- "A Night With The Witch of Indor"
- "The Middle-Age Spread"
- "Hogs That Wouldn't Root For The Devil"
- "The Salty Sister, Lot's Wife"
- "Backsliding Heifers"
- "Painted Dog Meat"

The title should be clear, brief, fresh, interesting, appealing, accurate, and religious.

Deriving the outline from the title

The development of the major divisions in a sermon outline is enhanced when the title contains a divisible element. If the title is in the form of a question, the major points should answer the question raised in the title. Some examples of such titles are: "What Difference Does Christ Make In Life?" (2 Cor. 5:17), "How Does Man Know That He Is Saved?" (1 John 5:13), and "How Should a Christian Face Affliction?" (1 Pet. 5:12-16).

The title may be in the form of a declarative sentence in which the verb is emphatic and gives direction to the major points. For example, "Christ Requires Ultimate Loyalty" (Luke 9:57-62) suggests that loyalty to Christ must surpass loyalty to possessions, to family, and to social customs. The sermon title could be stated in the form of a command. The Epistle of James, which uses numerous imperatives, lends itself to sermons with imperative titles: "Do Not Be a Respector of Persons" (2:1), "Do Not Blame God with Your Temptations" (1:13), and "Do Not Neglect the Poor" (2:5-10).

If the title consists of a noun qualified by a prepositional phrase, usually the noun gives unity and direction to the major points. The prepositional phrase will serve to limit the scope of the subject indicated by the noun. The noun, which is qualified by a prepositional phrase, receives the focus of attention even though the prepositional phrase states

¹These sensational titles are from a list shared by Dr. H. C. Brown with his students in homiletics classes.

Unscramble the following letters to show seven qualities of a good title.

1. *refib* _____
2. *testnirenig* _____
3. *hesrf* _____
4. *taruccae* _____
5. *gelriuois* _____
6. *lapapegin* _____
7. *relac* _____

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The major points in a sermon should answer the question raised in the _____.

(title)

If the title is in the form of a declarative sentence, the _____ gives direction to the major points.

(verb)

In a title consisting of a noun qualified by a prepositional phrase, usually the _____ gives unity to the major points.

(noun)

the broader subject. "The Nature of Christ" (Phil. 2:6-11) could have the simple outline that Christ was originally divine in nature, Christ assumed human nature, and Christ's human nature has been exalted. The broader subject is Christ, but the particular aspect to be discussed is His nature.

Very similar to the title with an emphatic verb is the title containing a limiting adjective. The limiting adjective in "The Second Coming" tells which coming of Christ is intended. "Saving Faith" focuses on the aspect of what kind. "God's Help in the Hour of Trial" answers the question of whose.

Structuring the Content for
Clear Communication

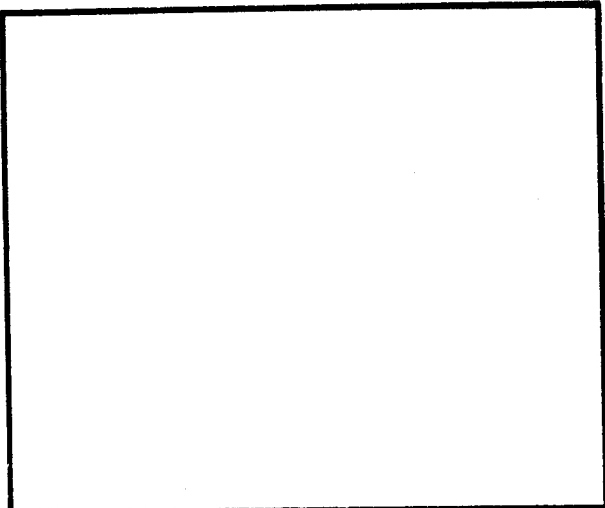
A satisfactory title may or may not become apparent after the text has been interpreted carefully. The next step following exegesis should often be a rough sketch or description of how the truth of the text meets human need. If several statements are needed in this description, they will likely become the content of the major points of the sermon. The title is a brief phrase, statement, or question which sums up the main thought of the statements. The statements can be reworded to show their relation to one another and to the title. The content of the sermon body is developed by explaining, elaborating, and illustrating each statement.

The major points, like the title, are not required to be declarative sentences, but they may be. The major points may be expressed as questions or simple phrases. Their purpose is to arrange the subject into its logical order. The title "Steps to Christ" suggests a chronological order for the major points. The main body of the sermon should move towards a climax which leads into the conclusion and the invitation.

The Conclusion

Andrew Blackwood has called the conclusion the most important part of the sermon, except for the text.² The conclusion embodies the purpose of the sermon and focuses on guiding the hearer into doing the will of God. The sermon should lead to action on the part of the hearer, and the conclusion calls him to that action.

²The Preparation of Sermons (New York: Abingdon Press, 1948), p. 162.



Several descriptive statements of how the truth of the text meets human need will probably be the m _____ p _____ of the s _____.

(major points, sermon)

The main body of the sermon should move towards a climax which leads into the _____ and the _____.

(conclusion, invitation)

Match the following:

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| ___ 1. Leads hearer to action | a. conclusion |
| ___ 2. Calls hearer to the action heard | b. sermon |

(b-1, a-2)

The conclusion can follow a number of patterns. The most common and perhaps the oldest is the direct appeal. The speaker appeals to the hearers to respond to the truth which he has presented. The appeal is addressed to the conscience, and the hearer is urged to act in line with the specific objective of the sermon. If the sermon is evangelistic, the actions called for are repentance and faith. The direct appeal can also be used in sermons of consecration and ethics. Frequently the conclusion recapitulates the major points of the sermon. A didactic (teaching) message lends itself to this type of conclusion.

The conclusion may be a brief summary with renewed emphasis on the application. The application calls for the hearer to act. Application should be made throughout the entire sermon, but often it needs to be re-emphasized at the conclusion of the message. The words of the conclusion should attempt to answer the hearer's question: "In the light of this message, what does the Lord expect me to do?"

Another way of concluding a sermon is with an illustration. The illustration should throw light upon the specific objective of the sermon, but it should avoid introducing new material.

On occasions, sermons are closed with poetry. The closing poem should be of high quality and pertinent to the message. It should be short and restricted in use. The words of a hymn are appropriate as the conclusion of some messages.

The conclusion should be simple, appropriate, brief, and to the point. If the sermon has led to a climax, a short conclusion focuses attention on the appropriate response of the audience and appeals to those present to act. A long conclusion will be anti-climactic. The conclusion should be positive with an emphasis on Christian hope even though the sermon may have been negative and may have dealt with the dreadful, such as the wages of sin or the tragedy of divorce. It should be personal, but it should not indulge in personalities. It should be presented in such a way that each person feels it is directed towards him, but it should not appear obvious that it is intended for one particular person in the congregation.

Although humour may be used effectively in the body of the sermon, it has no place in the conclusion. Instead of shouting and screaming at the people, the preacher should speak as to friends, talking things over with those whom he wishes to enlist for the service of the King. Since the conclusion invites people to action, it is the climax of the hour; and nothing should be done to distract the attention of the people.

The most common and perhaps the oldest pattern of a sermon's conclusion is the _____.

(direct appeal)

Read the second, third, and fourth paragraphs of the text. Then do the exercise below.

Other ways of concluding a sermon are:

a brief s _____ with renewed emphasis on the a _____, an i _____, a p _____, or a h _____.

(summary, application, illustration, poem, hymn)

Should humour ever be used in the conclusion of a sermon? _____

(no)

The Introduction

The introduction may be prepared before or after the conclusion, but it should not be prepared until the purpose of the sermon and the major points have been determined. It should create interest in the subject. The idea of the sermon and its relation to the text and to the audience are presented. Usually the text is read during the introduction and the title of the sermon may be announced. It should present the issue or specific objective of the sermon which the body develops. Since the introduction is to focus attention on the message, an apology by the preacher for his appearance, health, or preparation should be avoided. Humour should be used only if it helps the speaker establish rapport with the audience and focuses attention on the message.

In the introduction, the preacher attempts to start where his people are and to lead them to his subject. The initial sentence is important because of the need to attract immediate attention. Literary devices which get the sermon off to a good start may include an unusual illustration, a challenging question, a vivid word picture, or a startling statement.³

In stating the purpose and creating interest, the introduction may answer the question: "Why bring that up?" The introduction explains why the address is important to the hearers. It may include an explanation of what is expected of them. The body of the sermon may support the explanation by giving well illustrated arguments and the logical conclusions of those arguments.

The introduction may follow one of several patterns in leading to the body of the message. It may begin with the explanation of the Scripture which serves as the text of the sermon. The sermon is usually preceded by worship in song and prayer. After people have entered into communion with God and expressed gratitude to God, they are ready to have God speak to them through His Word. This textual approach begins with the reading of the Scripture, and then it gives a brief explanation concerning the setting. Also, it may be important to explain a particular word or emphasis in the text. The Scripture usually means little to the people unless its background is given.

A sermon may be introduced by focusing on the interests and needs of the listeners in contrast to the textual approach which focuses on the meaning of the

Are the following statements regarding the introduction of a sermon true or false?

- _____ 1. The introduction should be prepared before the purpose and major points are determined.
- _____ 2. It may be prepared before or after the conclusion is prepared.
- _____ 3. It should not be prepared until the purpose of the sermon is known.
- _____ 4. The major points of the sermon should be determined before the introduction is prepared.

(false, true, true, true)

According to the first two paragraphs on this page, the introduction should--

1. create _____;
2. relate the _____ to the listeners;
3. present the specific _____ of the sermon;
4. start where the people are and lead them to the _____.

(interest, text, objective, subject)

³See H. C. Brown, Jr., et al, Steps to the Sermon (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1963), p. 127.

Scripture in its original setting. A third approach, the topical, emphasizes the meaning of the Scripture in its application today. It may include the announcing of the topic, an introduction to the Scripture, and an explanation of how the Scripture meets the particular contemporary need indicated by the title.

In order to create interest, the introduction may begin with the solving of some human problem which is vital and important to the hearers. The problem could puzzle the minds of the hearers or burden their consciences. This type of introduction assures that the message will deal with human needs. The body of the sermon sets forth the biblical answer to the problem.

The sermon could also begin with a striking quotation or appropriate illustration. A striking quotation may be similar to one taken from the experience of John Wesley. "I never forget a friend or forgive a foe," said a sea captain to John Wesley. Wesley replied, "It is to be hoped, Sir, that you never have sinned against God!"⁴ A quotation from James Denney of Glasgow could be used effectively after quoting 2 Corinthians 5:15: "Christ died for the difference between right and wrong." Pertinent and fresh illustrations make effective introductions. Illustrations help to capture the attention of the hearers and to throw light upon the truth to be expounded.

The sermon may begin with a life situation reference. The preacher may choose to read a portion of a letter, or he may refer to something he has overheard on the street or elsewhere. Frequently people discuss religious problems which puzzle them. The purpose of the sermon may be to give a biblical answer to the problem which has been overheard.

On occasions, an object lesson, using a coin, an old book, or some other item of interest, may be a part of the introduction. The object should not be something that will draw attention away from the message. In speaking against evolution, one preacher took a monkey into the pulpit with him. Another took a poisonous snake to illustrate faith in God's protection. Such object lessons are not recommended!

Invitations

Some preachers conclude their messages without giving an invitation. If the sermon has a specific objective, it has the need for an invitation. The invitation includes the challenge and opportunity for the

⁴Blackwood, The Preparation of Sermons, p. 117.

Match the type of introduction with its definition.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| <u>1.</u> Topical | a. The reading of Scripture and brief explanation concerning its setting. |
| <u>2.</u> Textual | b. Explanation of how the Scripture meets the contemporary need indicated by the title. |
- (Compare your answer with the text. See beginning of paragraph on previous page.)

Read the third and fourth paragraphs before doing the following exercise.

Creating interest through the introduction may be done by the use of a striking _____, an appropriate _____, a life _____ reference, or an _____ lesson.

(quotation, illustration, situation, object)

hearers to respond to the truth declared. On the basis of the specific objective of the sermon, the preacher tells the audience in specific terms what he believes God wants them to do. The invitation is part of the conclusion to the sermon. The truths which have been set forth require a particular response from the people. The preacher states quietly and firmly at the end of the conclusion what he wishes the people to do. While they are still seated, pondering on the application of the sermon to their lives, the preacher explains what kind of response they should make. Then they are given the opportunity to act under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

The invitation should not be rushed; neither should it be prolonged. After gaining experience, the preacher becomes sensitive to the moving of the Spirit of God in the hearts of the people. The invitation should not be concluded until it is evident that God has stopped working. On the other hand, the invitation should not be extended beyond the moment that it becomes obvious that nothing is going to happen.

The primary invitation focuses on the specific objective of the sermon. If the sermon has been on consecration, Christians are invited to make the appropriate response. Sometimes more than one invitation needs to be given. After the invitation to repent and return to Christ, the preacher may want to invite Christians to unite with the fellowship. Sometimes a Christian is moved by the Spirit of God to renew his commitment to Jesus Christ. On other occasions, God's Spirit speaks to individuals concerning Christian service. Every sermon should point to some decision; however, not all decisions need to be made publicly. Sometimes people resolve in their hearts to put into practice the truth set forth in the message.

The preacher should expect results when he has delivered the Word of God. He should not think, however, that the effectiveness of his sermon depends on the number of public decisions made. Otherwise, his concern for public decisions will lead him to use unworthy procedures in getting people to respond. Some evangelists feel that their reputations are at stake if they do not see numerous public responses during their invitations. In order to get public results, some evangelists revert to having people come forward to shake the preacher's hand "if they love the Lord." On occasions, pastors shame their people into making public decisions. It is doubtful that these unworthy approaches are used by the Holy Spirit to bring about meaningful experiences.

God has promised to bless His Word: "My word... shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). The

Fill in the blanks with the following words:

respond, invites, challenge, specific, God, hearers, opportunity, truth

The invitation is a _____ and an _____ for _____ to _____ to the _____ declared. It _____ people in _____ terms to do what _____ wants them to do.

(Compare your answers with the text. See the beginning of the paragraph on the previous page.)

Write "He should" or "He should not" at the beginning of each of the statements concerning the preacher's attitude towards decisions during the invitation.

- _____ expect results because of God's promise to bless His Word.
- _____ judge the effectiveness of the sermon by the number of public decisions.
- _____ resort to unworthy approaches in the invitation.
- _____ depend on the Holy Spirit.

(He should, He should not, He should not, He should)

preacher's duty is to be faithful in preaching the Word of God. At the end of the sermon, he gives the people opportunity to respond under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Unless the Holy Spirit produces conviction in the hearts of the hearers and leads them to respond publicly, decisions will not be meaningful nor lasting.

The preacher should be diligent in preparing his sermons, but he must be aware that their effectiveness depends on the power of the Holy Spirit. He may prepare and deliver a sermon according to the principles of homiletics and rhetoric, but it will be ineffective without God's power. On the other hand, there is no scriptural indication that the Holy Spirit has an affinity for poorly prepared sermons. The Spirit does bless the humble preacher who recognizes that spiritual results are by the power of God.

Are the following statements true or false?

- _____ 1. A sermon prepared and delivered according to the principles of homiletics and rhetoric will always be effective.
- _____ 2. The Holy Spirit is always present when a preacher has made little preparation.
- _____ 3. The Spirit blesses the humble preacher who recognizes that spiritual results are by the power of God.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. Why is the Bible, rather than philosophy or science, the best source for sermon subjects?

2. Why is the two-thousand-year-old message of the Bible relevant today? _____

3. How can a subject suggested by a human need result in a biblical sermon? _____

4. How may the pastor's devotional reading of the Bible suggest sermon subjects? _____

5. Name six kinds of sermons which are related to Christian growth. _____

6. List two ways texts are selected. _____

7. What are two uses of the text which the preacher must avoid? _____

8. Name five facts of historical background which are needed in interpreting Scripture. _____

9. What is a sermon title? _____
10. List six qualities of a good title. _____
11. Tell how the major points of a sermon are developed from titles which are in the following forms: (1) Question _____
 (2) Declarative sentence _____
 (3) Prepositional phrase _____
12. How may the major points be derived from the text? _____

13. List the possible patterns a conclusion to a sermon may follow. _____

14. List four purposes of the introduction. _____

15. How does the textual introduction differ from the topical? _____

16. What is the nature and purpose of the invitation? _____

17. What should be the preacher's attitude towards decisions during the invitation? _____

18. Do an exegesis of Matthew 6:19-23. After interpreting the Scripture, write out several statements which show how it relates to people's needs today. Try to sum up the several statements in one brief descriptive statement. Be prepared to present to the seminar a title and outline of a sermon based on the Scripture.

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3):

1. Define or explain preaching.
2. State the major and specific objectives of your sermon based on Matthew 6:19-23 (See No. 18, Basic Activity). After the major points of the sermon have been determined, write a brief introduction and conclusion to the sermon and identify the approach or pattern of each.

Advanced activity (Level 3):

1. Complete the sermon which you began in basic and supplementary activities by indicating the arguments, answers, subdivisions, and illustrations under the major points.
2. Explain what Paul meant by the "foolishness of preaching" in 1 Corinthians 1:17-21.

Seminar Discussion

1. Why is the Bible the best source for sermon subjects? What are other possible sources?
2. Have two or three students explain the procedures they follow in discovering a sermon subject and developing it into a completed sermon.
3. What is meant by the statement "scriptural units should be regarded"?
4. Explain the relation of the suggested way of interpreting a text to the definition of preaching at the beginning of the lesson.
5. What is the title of a sermon and its purpose?
6. When should the conclusion and introduction of a sermon be prepared and why?
7. Give the characteristics of a good invitation.