

leal. In fact, the 'studied plainness' of Puritan preaching often possesses striking eloquence of its own—the natural eloquence that results when words are treated not at all as the orator's playthings, but entirely as the servants of a noble meaning. One thinks at once of Bunyan and Baxter ere.

5. Puritan preaching was *Christ-centred in its orientation*. 'Young man,' said veteran Richard Sibbes to fledgling Thomas Goodwin, 'if ever you would do good, you must preach the gospel of the free grace of God in Christ Jesus.'¹⁶ Puritan preaching revolved around 'Christ, and him crucified'—for this is the hub of the Bible. The preachers' commission is to declare the whole counsel of God; but the cross is the centre of that counsel, and the Puritans knew that the traveller through the Bible landscape misses his way as soon as he loses sight of the hill called Calvary. Simeon's sermons had three avowed aims—to humble the sinner, to exalt the saviour, and to promote holiness; and it was the second aim that gave point to the first and meaning to the third. In this Simeon was as authentically Puritan as it is possible for a man to be.

6. Puritan preaching was *experimental in its interests*. The preachers' supreme concern was to bring men to know God. Their preaching was avowedly 'practical' and concerned with experience of God. Sin, the cross, Christ's heavenly ministry, the Holy Spirit, faith and hypocrisy, assurance and the lack of it, prayer, meditation, temptation, mortification, growth in grace, death, heaven were their constant themes. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* serves as a kind of gazetteer to the contents of their sermons. In their treatment of these matters they were deep, thorough, and authoritative. They spoke as holy experienced Christians who knew what they were talking about. Their rule was formulated by David Dickson when he charged a young minister at his ordination to study two books together: the Bible, and his own heart. The Puritans made it a matter of conscience to prove for themselves the saving power of the gospel they urged on others. They knew that, as John Owen put it, 'a man preacheth that sermon only well to others, which preacheth itself in his own soul. . . . If the word do not dwell with power *in* us, it will not pass with power *from* us.'¹⁷ Robert Bolton was not the only one who 'never taught any godly point, but he first wrought it on his owne heart'.¹⁸ Their strenuous exercise in meditation and prayer, their sensitiveness to sin, their utter humility, their passion for holiness, and their glowing devotion to Christ equipped them to be master-physicians of the soul. And deep called to deep when they preached, for they spoke of the black depths and high peaks of Christian experience first-hand. An old Christian who heard young Spurgeon, still in his teens, said of him, almost in awe, 'he was as experimental as if he were a hundred years old in faith.' That was a mark of all Puritan preaching.

7. Puritan preaching was *piercing in its applications*. Over and above

applicatory generalisations, the preachers trained their homiletical search-lights on specific states of spiritual need, and spoke to these in a precise and detailed way. Earlier we noted how Perkins in his *Arte of Prophecyng* distinguished the different classes of people that the preacher could expect to be addressing in any ordinary congregation: the ignorant and unteachable, who needed the equivalent of a bomb under their seats; the ignorant but teachable, who needed orderly instruction in what Christianity is all about; the knowledgeable but unhumiliated, who needed to be given a sense of sin; the humbled and desperate, who needed to be grounded in the gospel; believers going on with God, who needed building up; and believers who had fallen into error, intellectual or moral, and needed correction. Other subcategories spring to mind, once one starts thinking of congregations in these terms, such as the discouraged, the hurting, and the depressed (sufferers from 'melancholy', as the Puritans called it); perhaps Perkins had some of these in mind when, rather mysteriously, he identified as his final type 'a mixed people. A mixed people are the assemblies of our churches.'¹⁹ (Could 'mixed' here mean 'mixed-up'?) To all of these different groups the word of God must be applied.

To Perkins' classification of types of people we must now add the list of types of application that the *Westminster Directory for Publick Worship*²⁰ gives. Having laid it down that the preacher, after establishing and clarifying a truth, must 'bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers, even though 'it prove a work of great difficulty to himself, requiring much prudence, zeal, and meditation, and to the natural and corrupt man will be very unpleasant', the *Directory* specifies application ('uses') of six kinds:

- (1) instruction or information in the knowledge of some . . . consequence from his doctrine; (2) confutation of false doctrines; (3) exhorting to duties; (4) dehortation, reprehension, and publick admonition; (5) applying comfort; (6) trial [self-examination], (which is very profitable . . .) whereby the hearers may be able to examine themselves. . . . that accordingly they may be quickened and excited to duty, humbled for their wants and sins, affected with their danger, and strengthened with comfort [encouragement], as their condition, upon examination, shall require.

These types of application are all pastoral and evangelistic: the preacher should 'wisely make choice of such uses, as, by residence and conversing with his flock, he findeth most needful and seasonable; and, amongst these, such as may most draw their souls to Christ. . . .' In form they are inferential and logical, being structured thus: since this is true ('this' being the truth just taught), you must (1) be sure of the following further truths, which it implies; (2) abjure the following errors, which it contradicts; (3) do such-and-such good things, which it requires; (4) stop doing, or avoid

doing, such-and-such bad things, which it forbids; (5) take to yourself the encouragement which it offers; (6) ask yourself where you stand spiritually in the light of it, and how far you are living by it. The quality of a preacher depended ultimately, in the Puritan estimate, on the clarity, wisdom, authority, and searchingness that hearers found in his application.

It was not, of course, possible for any preacher to make all six types of application to all seven types of listeners in any one sermon. Forty-two distinct applications would take all day! But Puritan pastoral preachers would spend half or more of their preaching time developing applications, and anyone making an inventory of their published sermons will soon find examples of all forty-two specific applications, often developed with very great rhetorical and moral force. Strength of application was, from one standpoint, the most striking feature of Puritan preaching, and it is arguable that the theory of discriminating application is the most valuable legacy that Puritan preachers have left to those who would preach the Bible and its gospel effectively today.

8. Puritan preaching was *powerful in its manner*. The Puritan covered unction in the pulpit. He aspired to be what Baxter calls 'a plain and pressing downright preacher', speaking from a full heart 'in good sadness [good earnest]', 'with life, and light, and weight.' He sought to preach (as was once said of a Puritan minister) 'as if death were at his back'—in Baxter's words:

As one that ne'er should preach again,
And as a dying man to dying men.

And unless the Spirit was upon him, so that he felt what he spoke, it was to the Puritan mind hardly *preaching* at all. Later evangelicals were in agreement; Simeon said:

It is easy for a minister to prate in the pulpit, but to preach is not easy—to carry his congregation on his shoulders, as it were, to heaven; to weep over them, pray for them, deliver the truth with a weeping praying heart; and if a minister has grace to do so now and then, he ought to be very thankful.²¹

That was why Baxter insisted, as we saw at the beginning, that

a minister should take some special pains with his heart, before he is to go to the congregation; if he be then cold, how is he like to warm the hearts of the hearers? Therefore, go then specially to God for life; and read some rousing, awakening book, or meditate on the weight of the subject of which you are going to speak and on the great necessity of your people's souls, that you may go in the zeal of the Lord into his house.²²

Such was Puritan preaching, and such was evangelical preaching generally till recent times. It was preaching of this kind that made evangelicism great in the past, and there seems little likelihood that evangelicism will be great again without a return to it. The churches of the West are currently in confusion about the way to make preaching spiritually significant for the modern congregation, and are treating the problem as primarily one of devising appropriate techniques. Technique is, of course, necessary in preaching, and it would not be false to say that the Puritan technique of exposition and application has been our theme in this chapter. But the Puritans themselves would be the first to insist that there is more to significant preaching than mere technique, even applicatory technique: and it seems appropriate to close by allowing Richard Baxter, 'Mr Reformed Pastor' as we may well call him, to speak once more, and make to his fellow-preachers the point—the cluster of points, rather—which today's church is too apt to forget.

All our work must be done spiritually, as by men possessed of the Holy Ghost. There is in some men's preaching a spiritual strain, which spiritual hearers can discern and relish. . . . Our evidence and illustrations of divine truth must also be spiritual, being drawn from the Holy Scriptures. . . . It is the sign of a distempered heart that loseth the relish of Scripture excellency. For there is in a spiritual heart a co-naturality to the Word of God, because this is the seed which did regenerate him. The Word is that seal which made all the holy impressions that are in the hearts of true believers, and stamped the image of God upon them; and, therefore, they must needs . . . highly esteem it as long as they live. . . .

Our whole work must be carried on under a deep sense of our own insufficiency, and of our entire dependence on Christ. We must go for light, and life, and strength to him, who sends us on the work. . . . Prayer must carry on our work as well as preaching; he preacheth not heartily to his people, that prayeth not earnestly for them. If we prevail not with God to give them faith and repentance we shall never prevail with them to believe and repent.²³

pointed, that no one stopped to criticise or admire. Each carried away the arrow fastened in his heart, considering himself to be the person addressed, and having neither time, thought, nor inclination to apply it to others.¹

We must not expect our hearers to apply to themselves such unpalatable truths. So unnatural is this habit of personal application, that most will fit the doctrine to any one but themselves; and their general and unmeaning commendation too plainly bespeaks the absence of personal interest and concern. The preacher must make the application himself.² The "goads and nails" must not be laid by, as if the posts would knock them in; but "*fastened* by the masters of assemblies."³ To insist therefore upon general truths without distributive application; or to give important directions without clearing the way for their improvement—this is not, according to the design of our Ministry, to lay the truth at every man's door, to press it upon every man's heart, and to "give to them their portion of meat in due season."⁴ That tone of preaching, that smoothes down or qualifies revolting truths—that does not cause the hearers some uneasiness—that does not bear directly upon them as individuals, but feebly illustrates the living power of the word;⁵ nor will it ever "*compel sinners to come in*"⁶ to the Gospel.

¹ Mr. Cecil adopted Lavater's practice—to fix on certain persons in his congregation, as representatives of the different classes of his hearers—to keep these persons in his eye in the composition of his sermons—and to endeavour to mould his subjects, so as to meet their respective cases. This rule obviously requires much judgment to avoid that personality, which—except in particular cases, (1 Tim. v. 20.) belongs to private—not to public rebukes. (Matt. xviii. 15.) Perhaps the better general rule would be to aim at that direct exhibition of truth, which would compel conscience to do its own work in individual application. Compare Dwight's Sermons, Vol. ii. 451-454.

² See 2 Sam. xii. 1-7. When John preached generally, "Herod heard him gladly;" when he came to particulars of application—"It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife"—the preacher lost his head. "The Minister" (as an excellent old Divine observes) "should desire to have that knowledge of all his hearers, that he may be able to speak as particularly to every one as is possible. (Jer. vi. 27.) Though he may not make private faults public, or so touch the sin, as to note and disgrace the sinner; yet he may apply his reproofs particularly, so that the guilty party may know and feel himself touched with the reproof. We must in preaching aim as directly as we can at him, whom we desire to profit. Our doctrine must be as a garment, fitted for the body it is made for; a garment that is fit for every body, is fit for nobody. Paul saith of himself, that in his preaching he laboured to *admonish every man, to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*" Hildersham on John iv. Lect. lxxx. Eccles. xii. 11. ⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 15, with Luke xii. 42. ⁵ Heb. iv. 12. ⁶ Luke xiv. 23.

It will probably only produce the heartless reply—"How forcible are right words! but what doth your arguing reprove?"¹ This palatable ministry, that blunts the edge of "the sword of the Spirit," in order to avoid the reproach of the cross, brings upon the preacher a most tremendous responsibility.

Personal application formed the nerve of the preaching of the Jewish prophets,² and of our Lord's public and individual addresses. His reproofs to the Scribes and Pharisees, to the Sadducees and Herodians, had distinct reference to their particular sins.³ In his treatment of the young ruler,⁴ and the woman of Samaria,⁵ he avoided general remark, to point his instructions to their besetting and indulged sin—'talking to their thoughts' (as a sensible writer has observed in the case of the young man) 'as we do to each other's words.'⁶ Peter's hearers "were pricked to the heart" by his applicatory address.⁷ Even the hardest heart—the most stubborn sinner—is made to smart under the point of the two-edged sword.⁸

Nothing of this kind is found in the instructions of the heathen sages. Plato, Aristotle, and Tully, dealt out to their disciples cold and indefinite descriptions of certain virtues and vices; but with no endeavours to impress the mind with personal conviction. Horace and Juvenal attempted something in this way; but in a spirit more likely to excite ridicule and disgust, than to produce any practical result. Their system was a mass of inert matter, without action. Such probably also were the instructions of the Jewish teachers—consisting chiefly (as the Evangelist implies) of spiritless disputations, drawn from the traditions of men, with no power to work upon the mind, affections, or conscience.⁹

Preaching, in order to be effective, must be reduced from vague generalities, to a tangible, individual character—coming home to every man's business, and even to his bosom. He goes on in a slumbering routine of customary attendance. Nothing

¹ Job vi. 25. It was observed of Philip Henry, that 'he did not shoot the arrow of the word *over the heads* of his audience, in the flourishes of affected rhetoric, nor *under their feet* by homely expressions, but to *their hearts in close and lively application.*' Life, p. 59. ² Isaiah lviii. 1. Micah iii. 8. ³ Comp. Matt. xxii. xxxiii. ⁴ Matt. xix. 16-22. ⁵ John iv. 7-26. Comp. Bishop of Winchester's Min. Char. of Christ, ch. 13. ⁶ Benson's Life of Christ, p. 300. ⁷ Acts ii. 22-37. ⁸ 1 Kings xvi. 20. xxii. 8. Amos vii. 9. Luke iv. 28. Acts v. 33. Rev. xi. 10. ⁹ Matt. vii. 29, with Mark vii. 1-9.

but the Preacher's blow—the *hand not lifted towards him, but actually reaching him*—will rouse him to consideration. There is no need to mention names. The truth brought into contact with the conscience speaks for itself.¹ Even the ungodly can bear forcible sermons, without any well-directed aim. The general sermons, that are preached to every body, in fact are preached to no body. They will therefore suit the congregations of the last century, or in a foreign land, as well as the people before our eyes. 'Such discourses' (as Bishop Stillingfleet remarks) 'have commonly little effect on the people's minds. But if any thing moves them, it is particular application as to such things, in which their consciences are concerned.'² We must therefore preach *to* our people, as well as *before* them. 'The conscience of the audience' should 'feel the hand of the Preacher searching it, and every individual know where to class himself.' The Preacher, who aims at doing good, will endeavour above all things to insulate his hearers, to place each of them apart, and render it impossible for him to escape by losing himself in the crowd. At the day of judgment, the attention excited by the surrounding scene, the strange aspect of nature, the dissolution of the elements, and the last trump—will have no

¹ Compare Matt. xxi. 45. John viii. 9. Often have Ministers been accused of preaching at individuals sermons written without the slightest knowledge of their cases. What is this, but the piercing of the two-edged sword? 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

² Duties and Rights of the Parochial Clergy, p. 31. 'General declarations against vice and sin, rouse men to consider and look about them; but they often want effect, because they only raise confused apprehensions of things, and undeterminate propensions to action; the which usually, before men thoroughly perceive or resolve what they should practise, do decay and vanish. As he that cries out 'fire' doth stir up people, and inspireth them with a kind of hovering tendency every way, yet no man thence to purpose moveth, until he be distinctly informed, where the mischief is; (then do they, who apprehend themselves concerned, run hastily to oppose it) so, till we particularly discern, where our offences lie, till we distinctly know the heinous nature and the mischievous consequences of them—we scarce will effectually apply ourselves to correct them. Whence it is requisite, that men should be particularly acquainted with their sins, and by proper arguments be dissuaded from them.' Barrow's Sermons. 'General discourses do not so immediately tend to reform the lives of men, because they fall among the crowd, and do not touch the consciences of particular persons in so sensible and awakening a manner, as when we treat of particular doctrines and sins, and endeavour to put men upon the practice of the one, and reclaim them from the other; by proper arguments taken from the word of God, and from the nature of particular virtues and vices.' Tillotson's Sermons, folio, p. 491. 'The preacher who only flourishes in general notions, and does not aim at some particular argument, is like an unwise fisher, who spreads his net to the empty air, where he cannot expect any success to his labours.' Bishop Wilkins's Eccles.

other effect, than to cause the reflections of the sinner to return with a more overwhelming tide on his own character, his sentence, his unchanging destiny; and, amid the innumerable millions which surround him, he will "mourn apart." It is thus the Christian Minister should endeavour to prepare the tribunal of conscience, and turn the eyes of every one of his hearers upon himself.¹

But this applicatory mode should extend to the consolatory as well as to the awakening exhortations of the Gospel; bringing home the general promises to specific cases, the promises of forgiveness to every distinct case of penitence and faith; of direction, support, or comfort, to each particular emergency, as if they had been made for it alone. The property of a good portrait well describes a good sermon—that it looks directly at all, though placed in different situations, as if it were ready to speak to each—"I have a message from God unto thee."²

The doctrine of the sermon requires wisdom; the application, earnestness. The one needs a clear head; the other a warm heart. The discussion of our subjects must be in a straight line. Considerable latitude is allowable in the application. Many points may be purposely omitted in the course of discussion, to be here enforced with more effect. We may here also fix upon

¹ Hall's Sermons, &c. pp. 23, 24. George Herbert's 'Parson was used to preach with particularizing of his speech; for particulars ever touch and wake more than generals.' Chap. vii.—'Let every preacher so preach, as every wise preacher ought to preach; not only unto men or unto men's ears, but into men's ears, and into men's hearts also, if possible. It is easier to find out a sermon top reach unto the people, than to find out this skill and wisdom, how to be able to distil or preach a sermon into the people.' More's Wise Preacher.

² Judges iii. 20. See Bishop Burnet's admirable remarks upon application at the close of our discourses. Pastoral Care, ch. ix. on Preaching. Also Claude's observations, with Mr. Simeon's notes appended. Mr. Alleine's preaching beautifully illustrated the 'heart and soul,' which the Bishop would bring to this point.—'So loth was he to labour in vain, and to pass from one discourse to another, as one unconcerned whether he had sown any good seed or no on the hearts of his hearers; that in the close of his applicatory part on any text, he ever expressed his great unwillingness to leave that subject without some assurances, that he had not "fought" in that spiritual warfare, "as one that beateeth the air;" when also he expressed his great fear, lest he should, after all his most importunate warnings, leave them as he found them. And here, with how much holy taking rhetoric did he frequently expostulate the case with impenitent sinners, in words too many to mention, and yet too weighty to be forgotten; vehemently urging them to come to some good resolve, before he and they parted, and to make their choice either of life or death!' Alleine's Life and Letters.

Homework for Mar. 9, 2016

1. Listen to ANM Lecture 22 "Illuminating Devices in Preaching" (This is Lecture 8 in the notes you have).

2. Romans 3:24-25a
 - Envision that you are preaching through Romans...so your people are very familiar with the context
 - You are addressing a mixed congregation:
 - Young to Old (age)
 - Mature to Babes (spiritual development)
 - Unbelievers present
 - Do an exegetical study of the text...with a focus on word studies...but also outline the verses (not a sermon outline but outline Paul's thought structure)
 - Do a brief outline of a Sermon body
 - PRIMARY TASK: Come up with 3 illustrations (one for each concept) to explain:
 - Justification
 - Redemption
 - Propitiation

3. If time: listen to Lectures 29-30 The Introduction of a Sermon