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THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE SERMON

A Thesis presented to the
Faculty of Concordia Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

George E. Kurz

Concordia Seminary,
April 15, 1939

Approved by

Frank W. Smith
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Dr. Luther once wrote: "There is no more precious treasure nor nobler thing upon earth and in this life than a true and faithful parson and preacher. The spiritual preacher increaseth the kingdom of God, filleth heaven with saints, plundereth hell, guardeth men against death, putteth a stop to sin, instructeth the world, consoleth every man according to his condition, preserveth peace and unity, traineth young people excellently, planteth all kinds of virtue in the nation; in short, he createth a new world and buildeth a house that shall not pass away." 1.

But how can a pastor successfully do all these things? We do not endeavor to give a complete answer to that question. We do say this much, however: In order to realize the beautiful portrayal of the ministry that Dr. Luther has painted in the above quotation, the preacher must, among other things, know rightly how to apply the Word of God; he must be able to satisfy the needs of his flock. True, he must preach the Word - but he must do more than that; he must faithfully and correctly apply the Word. If he cannot do that, he is a failure. For example, a pastor preaches a sermon on the duties of a millionaire to an audience of streetsweepers and WPA workers. It is an excellent sermon, and it would be all right - if applied to the right hearers - but as it is, preached to the poor and needy, it does no good; it does not satisfy their needs. "A ridiculous example," protests the reader. We agree, but all too often the pastor approaches the ridiculous in making the practical application of his sermon; he fails rightly to apply the truth of his text; he fails to edify the faith and life of his hearers. Thus, we see the importance of the practi-

1. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 67

cal application of the sermon.

Spurgeon once wrote that "where the application begins, there the sermon begins."¹ Since the application is so important, it will be the primary purpose of this thesis to offer suggestions to the preacher on how he may improve and develop his ability in constructing the practical application of his sermon. The paper shall not be limited to mere suggestions, however; we shall discuss and make a study of the subject from all important angles (such as: the nature of the application, the necessity of the application, the purpose of the application, etc.). Writing on a subject of this type is not like making a report on some historical topic. Authority in such a paper as this demands the wisdom of an experienced pastor. The author is as yet not a pastor, and hence he must take advantage of the experience of others; he will be forced to use frequent quotations, in order to prove his points. --- But let us proceed in the following to the first point!

1. Broadus, "Preparation And Delivery Of Sermons", p. 230

I. THE NATURE OF THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

In discussing "The Nature of the Practical Application" It is our purpose to give a definition of what is meant by the concept "practical application" and to present briefly a general survey of what is concluded in this concept. What we offer now in general shall be discussed later in detail. Hence, as the body of the paper progresses, we warn the reader that there shall be necessary repetitions of the thought that we shall outline in general in this chapter before us.

A. THE APPLICATION IN GENERAL

DEFINITION OF THE APPLICATION - What is the practical application of the sermon? In short, it is the applying of the truth of the text to the needs of the people, for the purpose of making a change in the people, either in faith or in life. "It is nothing more and nothing less than the focusing of the truth of the text, in a concrete and practical manner, upon present-day persons, problems, and conditions."¹

Many pastors make the mistake of speaking before the people, instead of speaking to the people. They forget that there are blood-bought souls before them, and that they must be instrumental in saving these souls. Hence, they look forward to their Sunday sermons with a feeling of indifference, a "get-it-over-with" attitude; they recite the truth, instead of applying the truth! Phelps, in his "Theory of Preaching", writes that "preaching, in the high ideal of it, never discusses truth for the sake of discussion; never illustrates truth for the sake of display."² He means to say that the

1. Friedrich, "The Practical Application in the Sermon", CTM, V.5, p.250
2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 515

pastor must not present the truth of his text as though he were writing an examination on Dogmatics, for the classroom. A recitation of the truth without the practical application is next to useless.

ESSENTIAL PARTS OF THE APPLICATION - But what are the component parts of the practical application? We answer this question briefly at this point in our discussion in order to give the reader an idea of what is included by the concept "practical application"; as the thought progresses, we shall go into detail on the various considerations that must be observed in making a study of the practical application. Suffice it to say, at this point, that in his application the pastor must reach the needs of the people; on the basis of his text, he must tell the hearers what to do, how to do it, and he must use the persuasive appeal to the will to inspire them to act.

"Besides the application proper, in which we show the hearer how the truths of the sermon apply to him (what to do), and besides the frequent practical suggestions as to the best mode and means of performing the duty urged (how to do it), there is also commonly included all that we denote by the terms 'persuasion' and 'exhortation' (persuasive appeal)."¹

PERSONAL APPEAL OF THE APPLICATION - Since the pastor is talking to people, and not before people, it naturally follows that his application of the truth must be personal to the hearer. We set up St. Paul as the model. Paul preaches before Agrippa; but he also preaches to Agrippa. What was it that made Agrippa cry, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26, 28)? He had been touched. Paul stood

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p. 230

before him in fetters - a sad specimen - "but the Word of God is not bound;" and by the proper personal appeal in applying the Truth he almost effected, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the conversion of King Herod Agrippa. Hear his pointed personal appeal: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" (Acts 26,27). Paul was aiming at the heart; he was trying to make the Truth he had presented personal to the hearer, as we see from his conclusion: "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (Acts 26,29).

We cannot all be St. Pauls. Granted! But why is it that some preachers fall so miserably short of even approaching the high plane of St. Paul's preaching? Or, putting it another way, why is it that they cannot hit the heart? The answer is obvious: They do not understand the principles governing the invention and the use of the practical application. Some have no practical application at all in their sermons; others try to apply the truth of the text in the same dry, stereotyped, superficial manner Sunday after Sunday. Still others endeavor to explain away their feeble applications as follows: "There are two types of sermons," they say, "the textual and the practical; if you want to be practical, you must sacrifice the textual character of the sermon!" That is wrong. The practical sermon must be textual, and the textual sermon must be practical. In view of this common misunderstanding among many ministers, it is entirely in order under this

discussion of "The Nature of the Application" to mention briefly a few of the necessary principles that must be understood "a priori" by the pastor who would meet the requirements for making good applications in his sermonizing.

B. THE APPLICATION MUST BE TEXTUAL

As said above, the practical application of the sermon must be textual; i.e., it must have its origin in the text. It must not be a mere appendage to the body of the sermon; nor must it be a series of exhortations built around the over-used expression, "Let us!"; nor must it be a rhetorical ornament suggested by the ingenuity of the preacher. The application must not be imposed upon the text, but it must be drawn out of the text. If it is imposed upon the text, it destroys the unity of the sermon and divorces the message from the text.

Dr. M. Reu writes: "The truth contained in the text is set forth in its value for the present and laid in all its naturalness, without violence, upon men's hearts, so that the application will grow by an inner necessity out of the text and will be nothing else than the organic unfolding of the text."¹

Since the application must grow out of the text, Prof. Friedrich gives a helpful hint when he advises: "Since this is an essential requirement, it is obvious that the selection of applications dare not be postponed till the outline of the sermon has been completed, but that, on the contrary, their invention must be given a prominent place in the preacher's meditation on the text."²

1. Reu, "Homiletics", p. 362

2. Friedrich, "The Practical Application in the Sermon", CTM, V.5, p.250

But what preliminary procedure should the preacher follow, if he is to make his applications textual? Homileticians agree in laying down the following two necessary rules:

1. The pastor must study the text for the purpose of understanding the exegetical and historical background. He must establish what the meaning and the purpose of the text were at the time it was written.

2. The pastor must make a special homiletical study of the text. This homiletical study must be based on the exegetical study, but it must advance farther.

"There will always be a difference between the exposition (exegetical study), which, in the interest of historical knowledge, seeks to understand and explain the text in its chronological setting, and the application (homiletical study), by which the inner life which has taken form in the text is placed into the thick of the present situation in order that it may recreate itself in new forms with the aid of the materials offered by the same." 1.

C. THE APPLICATION MUST BE GOVERNED BY A PROPER DISTINCTION BETWEEN LAW AND GOSPEL

In discussing the nature of the practical application in general, we have one more point to consider; namely, that the application must be governed by a proper distinction between Law and Gospel. The preacher must determine whether his text deals with Law or Gospel, and he must make the proper application according to the needs of the people. He must be able rightly to divide the Word of Truth, heeding

1. Reu, "Homiletics", p.50

well the words of St. Paul to Timothy: "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth" (2 Tim. 2, 15). "The Word of Truth is to be divided according to the needs of the people, Law and Gospel finding their proper application."¹ For instance, say the preacher is working out a sermon on Gal. 3, 10-13, and he wants to make a special application of the truth taught in verse 10: "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them." In applying this text to a mission congregation, composed largely of self-righteous, secure sinners, the pastor will drive home to them the truth that their works avail nothing before God in making them just and holy - and then he will make a strong application concerning Justification by Faith. He will concentrate largely on the Gospel-application, which follows as a logical inference from the truth taught in the verse. If he makes an application on this same verse to an indoctrinated congregation of believing Christians, he will have an opportunity (from inference) to instruct the people on the third use of the Law, as a rule for good works and the Christian life of Sanctification. The pastor can take it for granted to a certain extent that the people will readily agree that good works avail nothing in Justification (although even good Christians must constantly be reminded of that). Hence he can ask: "Are we then to disregard the

Law altogether?" - To which question he will reply: "No! We must use the Law as a rule!" - And then in his application he will dwell briefly on the third use of the Law (It is understood, of course, that better texts may be taken from the Bible to show the third use of the Law; the author merely uses this one verse to show how a logical inference may be made from the text in order to present a practical application by "rightly dividing the Word of Truth").

II. NECESSITY OF THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Why is the practical application necessary? In view of this necessity, what must the preacher do about it? In answering these questions we shall consider the following points: We shall discuss the necessity of the application as being prompted by conditions in the world, the needs of the human heart in general, and the particular needs of the congregation; and as we study these factors, we shall continually make references to the pastor's duty in view of this necessity of the practical application.

A. CONDITIONS IN THE WORLD DEMAND THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

In the first place, the practical application of the sermon is necessary because conditions in the world demand it. "Men have not changed, but conditions have changed."¹ We do not mean to say that man is more sinful today than in the past, and that therefore conditions in the world today demand the practical application of the sermon, whereas in the past it was not needed. Our contention, first of all, is this: "Men have not changed." Man has always been sinful, and therefore he needs the Word of God. He is still tempted by the devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh, just as he has always been. By nature he can do nothing to fight these ancient enemies; he is spiritually dead. Conditions in the world today, however, have made matters even worse. Hence, our second contention is this: "Conditions have changed."

1. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p.97

The popular magazine, the novel, the tavern, the modern dance, the radio, the motion picture, riches, the temptations for evil offered by the automobile - all of these are factors that challenge and threaten the spiritual welfare of our people. Another consideration that must be made is that in this twentieth century we have the "mob-age". The mob spirit is evident in the crowded streetcar, on the streets of the big city, and in the aisles of the busy department store. Man feels insignificant; it is easy for him to forget that his is a blood-bought soul. All of these obstacles to the Christian's edification must be met and answered; they demand the practical application of the sermon.

THE PASTOR'S DUTY - What then is the pastor's duty in view of this necessity? He must study the times, the age in which he lives, the temptations that confront his people. "The preacher must understand the age in which he lives, with all its important movements, its latent tendencies and perplexing cross-currents, its particular problems, and the manifold dangers with which it confronts his people."¹

Why does so much of our preaching leave the hearers cold? McComb answers this question in his "Preaching in Theory and Practice": "Much preaching today leaves the hearer cold, and the question is, Why? Mainly because many preachers have no real vision and therefore no real understanding of the times. They are still living in the past."² "The old Gospel should be applied to the peculiar needs of the time in which one is living and have due regard for the needs of

1. Friedrich, "Practical Application in the Sermon", CTM, V.5, p.252
2. McComb, "Preaching in Theory and Practice", p.5

man under such present conditions and circumstances."¹.

The pastor must study the times. True! But how can the pastor learn to understand the times? He must get out into the world! He must not remain secluded in his study. He must learn what is going on in the world; he must study the times! If he does that, then will he be able to be practical in his sermons. As Schuster puts it: "Heraus aus der Studierstube! Hinein ins Leben!"². "It is not a mark of excellency, but a decided shortcoming, if the times are not reflected in the preacher's personality, if the character of the age either does not influence it at all or passes through it as through a vacuum."³. Even Dr. Luther says: "Ein Prediger muss die Welt kennengelernt haben."⁴. And so we see that conditions in the world demand that the pastor be most careful and conscientious in working out his application; and to do that he must know the times; and to do that he must study the times!

The words of Dr. Fritz deserve mention: "A preacher therefore must well study the time in which he lives and learn which errors, prejudices, dangers, sins, vices, etc., are especially threatening to do harm to the souls which Christ has bought with His precious blood and which the Lord has entrusted to the pastor's care and for which the pastor will have to give an account unto God, Heb. 13, 17." ⁵.

The pastor must remember this one thing, however; namely, that although conditions in the world are changed, the root of all woe and wickedness round about the Church is sin! He must most certainly consider the times and the changes of the age in which he is living, but in his applications he

1. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 95

2. Quotes from Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, V.5, p.252

3. Schweitzer, "Homiletics", p. 274

4. St. L. Ed., XXII, 673

5. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p.97

must strike at the troublesome factor that lurks behind it all - sin. He must aim at sin, and he must hit the mark!

Once more we repeat the convincing thought of Dr. Fritz:

"While the changed conditions today have to some extent taken on a new aspect and thus present new and different problems, the underlying cause of all evil even today is sin, which is essentially doing its work in the same way it ever has done. Also its peculiar manifestation, such as money-madness, pleasure-madness, and lust-madness, and, in the final analysis, unbelief, are clearly recognizable at all times in the history of the world, though in varying degrees and in different ways." 1.

To summarize, then: The conditions in the world demand the practical application, and in view of this necessity the pastor must know the age in which he is living; and as he applies the Word of God in his text to the demands of the times, he must strike at the root of the whole matter - sin!

B. THE NEEDS OF THE HUMAN HEART IN GENERAL DEMAND THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

But the pastor must do more than merely acquaint himself with the age in which he is living. He must know "people", the human heart; for the needs of the human heart in general demand that his sermons have a very practical application.

The human heart has many wants, and the pastor must satisfy these wants. We offer a few suggestions as to certain needs that are in the hearts of most people, needs which can be satisfied by proper applications. People continually worry; the pastor will find a warm, welcome spot in their hearts by directing to them the words of the Savior, "Let not your heart be troubled; I will not leave you comfortless; I will

1. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 10

come to you" (John 14, 1. 18). The longing in the human heart for peace offers abundant material and opportunity for another fine application. Most people are inclined to doubt certain things in religion (doctrines, God's justice, etc.). Why not then direct applications to the doubts of people? Fear also has a prominent place in the average human heart (fear of sickness, the future, old age, death, damnation). The self-sufficiency that lies in the hearts of many people, due to successes in the past, makes an excellent starting point for many applications, especially when the preacher wants to bring out our dependence on God. The human heart is also inclined to take the other extreme and be full of despondency because of certain things in the past, oftentimes caused by regret over certain manifest sins. What a fine heart-string for the pastor to touch when he preaches on forgiveness! He can make his application very practical by assuring the people that their sins are forgiven, and that they need not be despondent! Questioning God's justice is one of the most troublesome concerns in the heart of both Christian and unbeliever. You can never apply to the people too much the truth that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8, 28). That thought can be brought out beautifully in many texts, with different approaches, and never become tiresome.

THE PASTOR'S DUTY - In view of these needs of the human heart and the great possibilities offered the pastor if he is acquainted with them, what then is the pastor's duty, if he is

to make his applications practical? As said before, the pastor must know "people"; he must understand the human heart in general. He must associate with all classes of society, so he doesn't get a one-sided view. He must glimpse into the hearts of all - old and young, rich and poor, those that are a success and those that are a failure, skeptics and outspoken unbelievers, the sick and the dying, the happy and the despondent, the carefree and the worried, the businessman and the clerk, etc., etc.; - and he must associate with these people, for the purpose of learning their problems. Then will he be able to make his applications practical, and the conditions of the human heart demand that his applications be practical. If the people cannot satisfy the needs of their hearts at the church service, they will go elsewhere - and may God help them if they end up behind the crystal ball of a charlatan or behind the cards of the fortune-teller! We repeat once more: The pastor must study, learn, understand, and satisfy the needs of the human heart in general! The following quotation brings this out well:

"The preacher must know what lurks in the bosom of the average man. This, however, cannot be learned from books or by way of quiet meditation. Following the example of the Master, the earnest preacher of the Gospel will associate regularly, intimately, and sympathetically with all sorts and conditions of men. But a mere association with human beings, either professionally or socially or in a business way, will not suffice. The preacher must try to get a glimpse of their hearts, to discover their difficulties, to determine their aspirations and yearnings. In short, he must learn to put himself into their position and to ask himself: If this were my spiritual plight, what could this particular sermon text do for me? And how would the message have to be framed to incite me to a favorable reaction?" 1.

I want to quote from the sermon of a young man who most certainly must have asked himself these questions before framing his application; the choice of his words, which are weighed well, and the development of his thought show that he has a fine understanding of the human heart in general and of "what lurks in the bosom of the average man". Using as his text Philippians 3, 13.14, in which St. Paul presents the familiar picture of a Christian running in a race, he writes:

"The other great hindrance to spiritual progress is despondency. We must also forget the past lest we become despondent. There is nothing that will kill a person's enthusiasm as much as the memory of past failures. They hang on our legs like a prisoner's ball and chain, dragging us down into the muck and mire of despair - they leave us broken like a shattered window pane on the pavement, broken and hopeless and useless - beyond repair. The racer that stumbled or tripped at the beginning of the race will often despair when he sees the other contestants gaining ground. In our Christian life the past failures may have the same effect, but as Christians we must learn to forget the past. Paul did not always convert his hearers. Agrippa merely retorted, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' As far as Paul's personal life was concerned, there were failures also. In the 7th chapter of his epistle to the Romans Paul confessed, 'For the good that I would I do not, and the evil which I would not, that I do..... O wretched man that I am!'

"Like St. Paul we too must cry out, 'O wretched man that I am!' Sin too often taints our hearts and our holiest desires . . . But to make progress in your Christianity you must forget these past failures, lest you despair and turn your eyes backward, for no man can win a race looking backward, becoming either complacent or despondent."1.

The application shows a good insight into the human heart, aiming at one of the woes that we mentioned before as dwelling within the average human breast - despondency.

1. From a sermon preached in class by Walter Litke, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, January 1939

C. THE PARTICULAR NEEDS OF THE CONGREGATION DEMAND THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

But the pastor must do more than consider the human heart in general. He must also study the particular needs of his own congregation. These needs must be met and satisfied by the Word of God; they demand the practical application of the sermon.

THE PASTOR'S DUTY - How is the pastor to learn to know these needs? He must learn to know his flock! He must visit the members of his congregation, give them an opportunity to open up their hearts to him and tell their problems. He will find that his people will be more than willing to confide in their pastor, whereas they would not think of telling the same things to others.

The preacher must "understand his own congregation, those persons whom God has given into his care and to whom he is to preach the Word of Life week after week."¹ This leads us into the field of "Seelsorge", the cure of souls, a very important part of the pastor's work; for it supplies him with the richest source of materials for his meditation - he learns to know the needs of his people.

" 'The preacher,' says Reu, 'would make a serious mistake and jeopardize the success of his labors if he would neglect to make the life of his own congregation the subject of systematic observation and painstaking study.' A preacher ought to know what the special dangers are against which his congregation must be warned, what defects are in the spiritual life of his parishioners, how his people are being influenced by their environment, by what they read and by the particular tendencies of the time in which they live; he must also take into

1. Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, V.5, p.253

consideration such things as the degree of spiritual enlightenment, the cultural standard, the social standing, the age of his people, whether they live in the city or in the country, etc." 1.

Thus, to become a good, practical "Seelsorger" and to become acquainted with the problems of the people, the pastor must conduct regular pastoral visitations. Lyman says in his "Preaching in the New Age": "Never relinquish pastoral visitation . . . Pastoral visitation keeps the minister human; it puts a certain human, sympathetic quality into his preaching which is indispensable. Only conduct such visitation not carelessly, but nobly, tactfully, homiletically, so to speak."² In this connection Schuster gives good advice when he counsels: "If a man lacks originality in invention and brilliant oratorical gifts, then let him be all the more faithful and zealous in this department of his pastoral work. Ere long he shall perceive in his meditations the blessing which the Lord lays upon genuine pastoral love."³

If the pastor applies himself faithfully and zealously "in this department of his pastoral work" (pastoral visitation), he will find that the needs of his congregation actually demand that the application of his sermon be very practical. He will learn that the rich man in his flock has his troubles, too, and he will eagerly wait for an opportunity afforded by a sermon text to give this man edification or comfort, whichever is needed. He will find out that the old grandfathers and grandmothers in the congregation, the "old faithfuls", whose sincere Christianity he

1. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 88

2. Lyman, "Preaching in the New Age", p. 115

3. Schuster, "The Preparation and Delivery of the Sermon", p. 117

never doubted for a moment, have their weaknesses, too. He has a long chat with the aged, feeble Mr. Brown, and he learns to his surprise that the old man has a dreadful fear of old age, that he is hoarding, obsessed with a clutching greed, a sinful love of money. Upon further study of the needs of his people he discovers that others of the eldest in the congregation also have that unworthy lust for financial security, so characteristic of old age. What a need for a good, pointed practical application! The needs of his congregation demand it!

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A CHANGE MUST BE EFFECTED - The necessity of the practical application (conditions in the world, human heart in general, needs of the congregation) leads us to the next logical step in the development of our thought - the purpose of the practical application. The purpose of the practical application, as we can never emphasize too much, is to apply the truth of the text to the people in such a manner as to bring about a change within them, thus satisfying their particular needs. To cause this change (with the help of the Holy Spirit, of course), the pastor must observe a twofold objective in attaining the purpose of his application:

1. The pastor must endeavor to effect a change in the faith of the hearers. He must keep the people in faith, so that they remain Christians; and he must edify their faith - build it up, strengthen it; thus, change their faith!

2. The pastor must endeavor to effect a change in the life of the hearers. The pastor must direct his applications to the people in such a way that they may be built up and edified in their Christian life; that they may avoid sin and do good works; thus, that there may be a change in their lives!

MUST BE A "PERSONAL MATTER" - To realize this purpose of his applications, however, the pastor must make the subject matter of his text and sermon personal to the people. Daniel Webster once said, "When a man preaches to me, I want him to make it

a personal matter, a personal matter, a personal matter!"¹. Another way of defining the purpose of the practical application would be to say: "Make the matter personal! - so that there can be effected a real change in the personal faith and personal life of the hearers!" We mentioned this necessary personal element in the application once before, when we discussed the "Nature of the Application"; we repeat it once more in this connection, to emphasize its importance and to consider it somewhat more in detail.

I remember an incident in my Junior year at Concordia Seminary. I was listening to the Lutheran Hour with a fellow class mate. The Sermon was on "The Promise of Peace"; the text, John 14,27: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled." After the sermon was over, the student with me said: "That hit me; that was personal!" And then he later confessed that he had never been a real Christian before that. The purpose of the application of that sermon was to bring about a change within the hearts and lives of the members of that vast audience of the air, thus satisfying the various particular needs of these people. Who knows how many it struck! This much I know - it definitely supplied the needs and effected a change within the heart of at least one person; it was a personal matter to him. The young man was not hesitant in telling me the particular appeals/made in the sermon that impressed him, and I quote them in the following, in order to show the reader how in supplying the

L. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.230

needs of the people and causing a change within them, which is the purpose of the application, the matter can be made very personal:

"So 'let not your hearts be troubled'. Over the fever fret of our disjointed day this blessed comfort that only Christ can give reschoes as Heaven's eternal strength for earth's endless sorrows. When the two stratosphere voyagers reached the height of their ascent, almost fourteen miles over South Dakota fields, they reported that from this distance they could see no sign of life below; all was calm and motionless. And when we look at our world from the distance and study the lives of others, all may seem quiet and undisturbed. But approach more closely, penetrate beneath the pretty lacquer of life, and you will find heaped sorrows and endless grief. Men fight a hundred fears and forebodings by day, and when night comes, a thousand cares and worries haunt their happiness. If they are without Christ; if they spurn the high mercies of Heaven that His nail-scarred hands lovingly extend; if you, my grief-burdened friend, who have seen life at its worst and stagger under the impact of countless blows, hear Christ call to you, 'Come unto Me,' and you refuse to come, etc., etc." 1.

Note here how personal the appeal is in locating the particular burden weighing on the hearer's heart; and now in this next section, quoted below, see how personal the invitation becomes in exhorting the troubled sinner to grasp the comfort Christ offers him:

"Come, then, you, the lonely, the forsaken, the bereaved; the aged, the weary, the broken; you with your troubled youthful hearts, your imprisoned longings, your unuttered fears for the future, your dissatisfaction with yourselves" (note the appeal to despondency)!

"Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish,
Come to the mercy-seat, fervently kneel!"

"And as Jesus speaks to your soul, and you learn that

"Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal",

"you will feel the pressure of His guiding hand. You will hear Jesus whisper to your heart, to your soul, to your life, this promise: 'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you . . . Let not your heart be troubled.' Amen." 1.

Truly, such application is a "personal matter"; such application realizes its purpose - to work a change in the hearers by satisfying their needs in faith and life.

A SUGGESTION - But the question may be asked: How can we best make our applications personal, so that they better realize their purpose? For the young pastor, who is inexperienced in developing the art of making his applications personal, and for the older pastor who has become cold and stereotyped in his applications, the following procedure has been suggested by many homileticians: If the pastor finds it difficult properly to supply the needs of the people in his applications, let him forget for a while the system of pericopes that he may be following, and let him pick out a few texts that present some practical truths that have really benefited him in his life, texts which have given him comfort and assurance in his faith, touching his heart, giving him something that he could really feel and live. If these texts have helped him, then it is very probable that they will benefit somebody else. For instance, the pastor may take special comfort from St. Paul's victory cry in Romans 8, 28-39. Then let him preach on the thought that "if God be for us, who can be against us?" Let him give to the people the comfort and assurance that this text gives to him. Let him proclaim how this text satisfies many of his needs - his spiritual

I. Maier, "Christ for the Nation", p. 162

struggles and temporal problems - and he will find that he has supplied the needs of many in his congregation. Let him explain just what this text means to him, and he will discover that he has attained that which he has tried so long to achieve, namely, making the truth of the text a "personal matter"; for he will be speaking from experience; his words will come directly from the heart!

Dr. Reu has this personal assurance of the preacher in mind when he writes in his chapter on the relation of the sermon to the pastor:

"His preaching . . . must be the expression and presentment of the religious life within him. . . . What is the good of all his Bible knowledge and skill of interpretation, the correctness of his Christian ideas, the artistic structure and beauty of style of his sermons, if there be not felt through it all the throb of personal religious life? . . . The Word of God unfolds its inherent power in a very different manner when it is united with a living personality whom it has gripped in his inmost heart and from whose lips it pours as living testimony." 1.

If the reader will excuse the capital "I" once more, I would like to dwell a moment on an experience I went through myself. In my Junior year at the Seminary a classmate lost his life in a fire, while home for Christmas vacation. It seemed so unjust to many of us; we wondered why God should permit such a miserable end to come to this young steward, who had dedicated his life to the service of the Kingdom. I questioned God's justice. At the memorial service Prof. Friedrich preached on Col. 3, 1-4, which exhorts the Christian to "set his affections on things above, not on things on the earth", and in his application he inspired us to be

1. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 82

"heavenly-minded". That truth struck home; it effected a change within me; it satisfied my need; it made me want to be a minister, to bring comfort to others, as I myself had been comforted! - - - And now we come to the moral of the story: Since the practical application of this sermon found a welcome spot in my heart, - since it was a "personal matter" to me - I felt that it most assuredly would satisfy the needs of someone else; so I wrote and preached a sermon on the text myself, using the application of exhorting the people to be heavenly-minded when confronted with problems in this world that they cannot understand, comforting them with the thought of the joys and absence of sorrow and concern that awaited them in heaven. The application of the truth of that text had supplied my needs, created a change within me, strengthened my faith. --- Why shouldn't it do the same for somebody else?

Thus, to summarize, we see the purpose of the practical application: To apply the truth of the text in such a way as to make a change in the faith and life of the people, thereby satisfying their various needs; in doing this we keep in mind, to use once more Daniel Webster's expression, to make the truth a "personal matter"!

IV. SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE APPLICATION
OF THE WORD

A. THE FIVEFOLD "USUS" OF SCRIPTURE

We have just seen that the Word is to be applied to satisfy the needs of the hearers, so as to make a change in the people. But just how is this Word to be applied to these needs? How may the Word of God be rightly applied? That is the question we want to answer, and Scripture itself supplies the answer for us when it clearly and conveniently lays down the principles that are to govern the application of the Word. It gives the following directions: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," 2 Tim. 3, 16.17. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope," Rom. 15,4. Here we have a fivefold "usus" of the Word of God: usus didascalicus (doctrine), elencticus (refutation of error), epanorthoticus (reproving sin), paedeuticus (admonition), paracliticus (comfort). The pastor must treat his text and apply it according to these "usus". That does not mean, however, that every text must have all five of these elements. J.J. Rambach says: "Prudence must decide whether more than one 'usus' is to be employed and which one is to be stressed, which is to

be omitted or only briefly touched on."¹ In using these "usus" to develop the application of the Word, "the preacher must always examine what the material of the text, the needs of his congregation, and other considerations demand or permit."² Let us discuss these "usus", in order better to understand what must be at the bottom to form the foundation thoughts and truths of all applications of the Word.

USUS DIDASCALIGUS (DOCTRINE) - The Word of God has been given that it be "profitable for doctrine," 2 Tim. 3, 16. Every sermon must present a definite doctrine. Dr. Walther writes: "Let a sermon be ever so rich in exhortation, rebuke, and comfort, if it is devoid of doctrine, it is a lean and empty sermon, whose exhortation, rebuke, and comfort float in the air."³

Let the reader not be mistaken, however, in thinking that to preach a doctrinal sermon is to present a dry, dogmatical lecture. Young preachers especially try to dodge doctrinal sermons. "We must be practical," they maintain, "people will fall asleep if we preach doctrine!" We agree that we must be practical, but we reject the inference that a doctrinal sermon cannot be made practical. It is a mistake to differentiate between doctrinal and practical sermons. Every sermon must have a definite doctrinal content, with a practical objective; that is essential.

These words of Dr. Reu are noteworthy: "Young pastors yield not seldom to a timidity lest the multitude should be repelled by the homeliness of the truth; and they imagine that they are catering better

1. Quoted from Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 71
2. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 71
3. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 71

for the popular tastes by relieving them of the labor of attention and amusing them with rhetorical pyrotechnics."

And then Dr. Reu quotes the following words of Phillips Brooks: "No preaching ever had any strong power that was not the preaching of doctrine. The preachers that have moved and held men have always preached doctrine. No exhortation to a good life that does not put behind it some truth as deep as eternity can seize and hold the conscience." 1.

As an example of the truth of these words of Brooks we offer the following report of Phelps, quoted from his "Theory of Preaching":

"The German clergy, as a body, have neglected what I have elsewhere termed 'masterly' preaching. They have sacrificed strong thought, argument, doctrinal preaching, to the more emotive forms of religious discourse. They have indulged excessively in hortatory preaching. As a consequence, only the more emotive classes of society are usually found in German churches." 2.

Thus, we see the result when we abandon doctrinal preaching; the people abandon the pews; they gradually abandon the Church - and finally lose sight of heaven.

USUS ELENCTICUS (REFUTATION OF ERROR) - The Word of God should also be used for the refutation of error. To be a faithful watchman on the walls of Zion, the pastor must constantly be on the lookout for error or false doctrine that might influence the life and thought of his congregation.

"Error, false doctrine, must be refuted: not only gross error, 1 Cor. 15, 12ff., but also that of a finer sort, Gal. 5,9; not only in a most friendly manner, Gal. 4, 10-12, but also very decidedly and vehemently, Gal. 1,8.9; Phil 3,2; not only with reference to the false doctrine, but also with reference to the false teachers." 3.

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1. Reu, "Homiletics", p. 149
 2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 510
 3. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 73

Dr. Luther summarizes it well: "A preacher must not only pasture the sheep, that is, he must not only instruct his people how they may be true Christians, but in addition he must defend them against the wolves, so that the wolves may not attack the sheep and lead them astray with false doctrine."^{1.}

USUS EPANORTHOTICUS (REPROVING SIN) - Whereas in the usus elencticus the pastor refutes error and false teachers, in the usus epanorthoticus he deals with the congregation itself. Dr. Luther writes: "Whichever pastor or teacher does not rebuke sin must with the sin of others go to the devil, even though on account of his own forgiven sins he may be a child of salvation."^{2.} It certainly is no pleasure for the pastor to stand before the congregation Sunday after Sunday and warn the people that by nature, without Christ and His promise for forgiveness, they are all damned sinners, enemies of God, rebels, worthy of nothin but eternal death and condemnation. Neither is it easy for him to rebuke them for their sins, to narrow the wide concept of sin down to individual transgression of the Law, which are bound to strike home; but it is his God-given duty, and in spite of any protest, he must construct certain applications in his sermon so that they will awaken a deep sense of guilt in the hearts of his hearers. In rebuking sin there are two general rules that he must keep in mind:

1. The pastor must be serious in calling the people to task for sin; he must not be sour or sarcastic.

2. In rebuking sin the pastor must not in public

1. Quoted from Prof. Friedrich's Mim. Lecture Notes on Homiletics
2. Quoted from Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 75

direct his applications to an individual sinner, neither by mentioning his name nor by making it obvious to the congregation by a clear characterisation just who is meant. Not must the pastor aim his remarks at a certain group in the congregation - at least, not when everyone knows to whom he is referring. Such cases must be given attention privately.

A note of warning: The pastor must take extreme care in wording his application refuting sin. He must be tactful - for the wrong word at the wrong time may result in great harm. People are not slow in taking offense in such matters, especially when the preacher tries to force the shoe to fit!

USUS PAEDEUTICUS (ADMONITION) - We said above that the chief characteristic of a good sermon is the preaching of doctrine. True, but the pastor must also include in his application admonition or exhortation. That is an essential characteristic of the average sermon. The sermon must move the people to act; otherwise it has lost its purpose. "Because even Christians have the old sinful flesh, the best doctrinal sermons will not accomplish their purpose with them unless the doctrine be applied to their needs and they, by means of the Word of God, be moved to action." ^{1.} We shall discuss this more in detail later, when we consider the persuasive appeal of the sermon and the impelling motives in inspiring the people to act. Suffice it to say for now that the Christian wants to lead a holy life, even though he finds it difficult to do so, with the devil, the world, and his

1. Frits, "Pastoral Theology", p. 77

own sinful flesh always tempting him; he will welcome encouragement, and therefore he must be continually urged to do good works and to cease from deliberate sin. The preacher must not hold the hammer of the Law over his head, however; he can inspire the Christian to action only by the exhortation of the Gospel. "We must always bear in mind, however, that only Christians can be admonished, and that admonition, exhortation, is always impossible in the case of unbelievers."¹ St. Paul supplies the pastor with a fine homiletical rule in Rom. 12,1, where he shows that in the application of his sermon the pastor must admonish the Christians by the use of the Gospel. St. Paul writes: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God." The pastor, as St. Paul, must not command the believers, but he must use the good old Gospel-exhortation, keeping before them the love of God that sent Christ into the world to suffer and die for their sins!

USUS PARACLETICUS (COMFORT) - In making his applications the pastor must endeavor to apply the Word of God in such a manner as to give sweet words of Gospel comfort to his hearers. We have tried to emphasize that the basis of every sermon must be doctrine; but in no less degree do we emphasize that the ultimate object of the application of every sermon must be to give comfort from the Word of God. The apostle teaches us this in Rom. 15, 4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Every Christian needs this "comfort of the Scriptures."

1. Quoted from Prof. Friedrich's Min. Lecture Notes on Homiletics

As the pastor associates with the members of his congregation, it may seem to him that on the surface his people are perfectly content, that they need no comfort. That is not true. "The true Christian is more frequently dejected than^{1.} joyfully certain." He has to contend with fierce, inward struggles - "tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt, fightings and fears within, without" - soul-struggles, spiritual problems, worries, etc. Hence, the pastor must make his applications rich with comfort. He must not only give comfort to those who are troubled on account of their sins, however; comforting words of assurance must also be directed to those who are suffering under temporal afflictions - bereavement, a gnawing sickness, family trouble, feebleness of old age, loneliness, etc.

"A preacher should not imagine that a Christian must be so spiritually and heavenly minded and spiritually so strong that he will be untouched by the troubles of this life and will need no special comfort in this respect . . . A pastor should remember that nothing is more dangerous to the Christian than worldly sorrow and melancholy and that for this very reason Satan, who is a real joy-killer, is continually trying to drag the Christian out into the Slough of Despond and into the whirlpool of despair." 2.

Hence, the pastor must be a real "father" to his hearers; indeed, he must be a "mother" to his congregation, 1 Cor. 4,15; 1 Thess. 2, 7.8; Is. 66, 13. The Lord speaks to His people through the prophet: "Comfort ye, Comfort ye, my people, saith your God," Is. 40,1. The Lord still speaks to the pastor today, "Comfort ye my people!" That must be the pastor's duty, and he must earnestly keep it in mind as he works

1. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 80
2. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p.80

out the practical applications of his sermon; God demands it of him.

Some ministers will complain that there are certain passages of Scripture which offer no comfort at all, and that hence with certain texts they find it impossible to satisfy the inward, spiritual struggles of their hearers. The pastor is wrong in making this presumption. Below we give an example of how the preacher can draw comfort even from such passages of Scripture which at first glance do not seem to offer any comfort at all. We quote from the Second Articles of the "Formula of Concord":

"And Paul, Phil. 2,13: 'It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.' To all godly Christians who feel and experience in their hearts a small spark or longing for divine grace and eternal salvation this precious passage is very comforting; for they know that God has kindled in their hearts this beginning of true godliness, and that He will further strengthen and help them in their great weakness to persevere in true faith unto the end." 1.

B. THE "USUS" MUST BE APPLIED TO THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE

In working out his applications according to the five-fold "usus" of Scripture, however, the pastor must always bear in mind the primary purpose that in using these "usus" he must apply them to and satisfy the needs of the people.

"A pastor who neglects to do this will not only deprive his congregation of the spiritual food which it needs, but will perhaps commit even such foolishness as that preacher - so Luther relates - who before an audience of old women in an old people's home spoke much of the divine institution of marriage, highly praised it, and encouraged his hearers to enter the holy estate of matrimony." 2.

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1. "Concordia Triglotta", p. 885
 2. Fritz, "Pastoral Theology", p. 88

This is a very serious matter. We rightfully discussed it under "The Purpose of the Application", but it bears repetition in connection with the subject matter at hand, namely, the proper use of the "usus". The "usus" are used properly when they are applied to the needs of the people.

If you were a member of a well-indoctrinated congregation, well instructed in the truths of the catechism, and your pastor preached a sermon on the existence of God and pleaded with you in his application to believe that there is a God, exhorting you not to be an atheist, you would feel that it is time to start looking around for a new pastor; you have no need for such exhortation! Even the pastor at the mission station need not make such an exhortation. It is all right for the missionary in darkest Africa, but even he will not have to dwell at length on the matter; the pagan is no atheist. The point is this: When the pastor preaches doctrine, he must develop his application according to the amount of indoctrination in the congregation. Very simple - and so it is with the other needs of the people, other than doctrine. Would the preacher in India fill his applications with warnings against the satanic theories of evolution taught in public schools? He might, if evolution were taught there, since it is his duty to refute error. The pastor in the big cities of America must most certainly consider the danger of evolution as it is taught in the public schools; and if he learns from the young ones in his flock that their teachers are trying to influence their

Sunday School training on the Creation story, he must warn the people - young and old - against this false doctrine. It is his duty to refute the error (usus elenchticus); the need demands it. And in his practical application he must not only tell what to do and how to do it, but he must inspire them to take action.

Another need that the pastor must meet is that of re-proving sin. It would be foolishness for a preacher in a mission station, attended by the unchurched, to condemn dancing as a sin. Such an application of the Word would not fit the needs of the people. Rather should he spend his time preaching on the damnation of the sin of unbelief.

There is also the great need for comfort, as we saw when we discussed the usus paracleticus. Say, for example, that the pastor is the steward of a very poor congregation in the mountains of Kentucky. He must repeatedly give his people the necessary comfort to meet their temporal wants. In his application he must emphasize over and over the truth taught in 2 Cor. 8,9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." He must comfort the hearers with the thought that, in spite of their poverty and affliction, they are rich in Christ, rich in grace, rich in spiritual blessings and eternal life. When he thus supplies their needs, he is employing the fifth "usus" of Scripture in the proper manner.

We therefore see that in making his applications the pastor must observe the fivefold "usus" of Scripture, and in employing these "usus" he must consider most seriously the needs of the people; i.e., the need of indoctrination, of refuting error, rebuking sin, and of giving comfort; he must also, depending on the nature of his subject, include a certain amount of exhortation and admonition in the application.

V. CONSTRUCTING THE APPLICATION

A. INITIAL STEPS IN MAKING THE APPLICATION

MEDITATING UPON THE TEXT IN ADVANCE - The conscientious pastor will ask: "What steps should I take in making my application? What procedure should I follow?" We offer the following suggestions, all of which are stressed by the great homiletics. The initial steps in working out the application include, first of all, meditating upon the text in advance. That requires no great explanation. The sermon must "grow inside of the preacher". We said before that the pastor must study the needs of his people and earnestly meditate upon them, in order to develop practical material for his applications. This cannot be done in one sitting, however. The following quotation from Prof. Friedrich's article in the C.T.M. brings this point out very clearly:

"It is apparent that this type of meditation requires time. Even a gifted man cannot shake it out of his sleeve. Accordingly, it is advisable for the preacher to begin early in the week, yes, if possible to have several sermons in preparation weeks before they are to be used in the pulpit. This is what Alexander MacLaren called the process of incubation. It gives the sermon an opportunity to grow, and this is of importance particularly for its practical applications." 1.

This is good advice; we do not add to it.

APPLYING THE TEXT TO YOURSELF FIRST - In making his sermons the pastor must first apply himself to the text; and then, to secure a practical application, he must apply the text to himself! This is very important. The preacher must first

1. Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, Vol 5, p.253

preach to himself, before he preaches the text to his congregation. He must ask the important questions: "What does this text mean to me? What practical benefit can I derive from the truth of this text?" The pastor must do this prayerfully and honestly. Baxter used to sit at his desk with his finger on the text, repeatedly asking himself, "What lessons do these words convey to me?" Baxter was a humble man; he always meditated over his text with prayer, and "often, with tears of impassioned desire, would he pour forth his supplications for the spiritual success of his day's work."¹ For the "spiritual success of his day's work", however, the pastor must first prayerfully apply his text to himself, in order to discover "spiritual success" for his own soul. It is right here that many sermon applications fail; for, as Achelis says:

"The sermon will be deprived of its chief requisite, of its witness-bearing character, if the preacher does not first preach to himself the Word which he will preach to his congregation . . . Thereby (by the application of the message of the text to the preacher himself) the unity of the preacher with his message is effected and in no less degree the unity of the preacher with his congregation; for both are now subject to the same Lord and the same Word. The sinner speaks to sinners; he that has received grace to those to whom the same grace is offered and given; he who has been comforted by the Father of mercies and God of all comfort is able to comfort his congregation with the comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God." 2.

Achelis hit the point when he said that the preacher must first be comforted himself from the text in order to develop profound, searching, heart-touching practical

1. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 570

2. Achelis, "Practical Theology", II, p. 265

applications.

The heart must labor more than the head in developing the application. Hearers may think it very fine to listen to involved sentences, rhetorical catch-words, elaborated metaphor, rhythmical construction, and scholastic illustration; but they will feel that it is not the way in which hearts talk to hearts. " 'I thought your sentences were very pretty,' was the commendation by which one plain hearer thought to please a youthful preacher who had just finished a sermon on the Day of Judgment."¹ If the pastor receives such a compliment, he may take it for granted that something is wrong, and that it is time to check up on the spiritual condition of his heart and soul.

"The importance of the pastor's applying the truth of the text to himself is stressed by MacLaren: "And now this idea (the divine truth contained in the text) must be removed from the light where reason and imagination have their sphere and be hidden away in the dark chambers of the soul. This is not to be an intellectual proposition to be asserted and proved, of a fancy to be tracked out and exhibited. This is a spiritual truth to be commended to faith, a living principle to be enforced on conscience. It must therefore be first imprinted on the preacher's soul till it has become a part of his own being, before he can really understand or declare it. One reason why many masterly sermons fail is that they have never had the benefit of this process . . . They do not make way and lay hold of the hearers because they have never conquered the speaker." 2.

A PRACTICAL THEME - We have seen that the spiritual truth of the text must first conquer the speaker. But what steps must the pastor take in order to apply this truth to conquer the hearers? In the first place, the pastor must present the truth of the text in a good, specific, practical

1. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 569
2. MacLaren, "The Cure of Souls", p. 23

theme. There must be a definite objective to his sermon, a practical well-defined purpose, and the preacher must make this evident in his theme. Do not misunderstand this point; we do not say that if a sermon lacks this specific theme, it will be a total failure. But there is always the danger of rambling away from the subject when you preach on a mere doctrinal title, or a historical superscription. The pastor must spend great care in formulating a theme that will give him the opportunity of easily driving home his main application, and in doing this he must keep before him the needs of his audience. Pattison writes: "In dealing first with the preparation of the sermon let me repeat that the preacher must learn to prepare it with his audience in view. Do this, for one thing, in the choice of your theme."^{1.}

"Every sermon must have a well-defined practical objective. If this objective is incorporated into the theme of the sermon, the theme will not only captivate the attention of the hearer at once, but will also point out to the preacher the line of direction which his application must follow in order to realize the specific purpose for which he is preaching this particular sermon." 2.

If the pastor finds it difficult to work out a practical theme which will lead into the main application of the sermon, then let him sit down at his desk with a piece of paper before him. On the one side of this paper let him write down the chief thought of the text, and on the other side let him write down the chief application of the truth of the text. His object then will be to fuse

1. Pattison, "Making of the Sermon", p. 362

2. Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, Vol 5, p. 253-54

these two thoughts into a clear proposition. If he follows this procedure, the proposition is bound to be practical, since it will drive at the major application; and the only thing left for him to do is to develop from the proposition an attractive rhetorical proposition, which will be the theme. Easier said than done! - We realize that; but once the pastor learns to apply himself faithfully in doing this, he will notice that he is profiting. His applications will follow easily and logically from his theme, and he will be making a definite impression upon his hearers.

We give an example of how the application may be linked up with the theme, so as to have a specific, practical theme, and not a mere historical or doctrinal title. Say, for instance, that the pastor is preaching on Matt. 8, 23-27, where we see the Savior quieting the storm on the Sea of Galilee. The theme must not be a dry super-
scription, like "Jesus ^{of} the Sea of Galilee". What advantage does such a theme offer in bringing home the application? How can this theme make a deep impression on the hearers? Let the pastor take his chief thought - Christ stilling the tempest - and then let him formulate his major application. Let us say that he wants to warn and exhort the people against "doubt". Why not picture to the hearers the "storm of doubt" in the heart? As we said before, under the "Necessity of the Application", the human heart in general is filled with much doubt, especially in religious

matters. Does not the subject of "doubt" then offer a practical application? Should the word "doubt" be included in the theme? Not necessarily - the pastor may also want to bring in other storms in the human heart, as the storms of "fear", another characteristic weakness of the human heart. Why not direct the application at the various "storms" within the human heart? That is a good approach, as many homileticians testify. What about the theme then? Linking up our major application with the theme, we offer the following rhetorical proposition: "Piloting Us Through The Storm". That is just a suggestion; naturally, there is room for improvement; but the author hopes he has made clear the idea. Such a theme offers fine practical possibilities. For instance, after the storm comes the calm that Jesus brings - the peace in the heart. The idea of "the peace of God that passeth all understanding" makes a beautiful, practical application for any sermon; it is something after which the average human heart longs - peace of mind, peace of heart, peace of conscience, all following from the Christian's "peace with God", effected by the Redemption of Christ. If the pastor develops his themes in this manner, linking them up with his applications so as to make them practical, he will gradually meet and solve many perplexing problems for the people; he will leave definite impressions on them, and they will want to go out and live the sermons they hear!

"Start with a live issue, a real problem, personal or social, perplexing to the mind or disturbing to the conscience of the people; face that problem fairly, deal with it honestly, and throw such light upon it from the Spirit" (and, we add, from the Word) "of Christ that the people will go out able to think more clearly and live more nobly because of that sermon's illumination. That is real preaching; and not only has such preaching not been outgrown, but there are few things that modern folk are hungrier for than that." 1.

PLACE FOR THE APPLICATION - Where in the sermon should the application be placed? The old homileticians of England never used to reserve a special place within the body of the sermon itself for the application. They used to tack on to the sermon what they called the "conclusion" (the term being used differently by them than by us today), and in their conclusion they drove home their applications and lessons. Hence, they never referred to a definite part within the sermon as being the "application". What are the advantages of this method? Should the preacher use it today? It is certainly good homiletics for the preacher to repeat and bring home his final and major application in the conclusion. This application may follow logically from the last subdivision, or it may follow naturally as a separate thought from the last part. As long as it forms a natural conclusion, however, the preacher should by all means take advantage of it.

We protest, however, when it is said that the application should be limited to the conclusion alone. It is better to insert application in the sermon at least after every major part. That is the ideal, and we offer it as

1. Harry Emerson Fosdick, from his foreword to McComb's "Preaching in Theory and Practice", p.XI

the general rule. If the subject matter permits, the preacher may even interweave the application with the exposition as the thought progresses. If he does this at all, though, he must do it briefly, since it is not the rule. This much, however, we state definitely: There must be a close relationship between the exposition and the application; for the two belong together and at times may even be interwoven throughout the sermon. The sermon should not be all exposition, followed by a mere lump of an application. The best method is to place the application after each main division and, in some cases, of the subject matter demands it, after each subdivision. If the pastor does this faithfully, choosing his applications carefully, centering them all around the major application, his sermons will most certainly be practical. Prof. Friedrich writes:

"There must always be a close and intimate relationship in the sermon between the exposition and the application. The two belong together, and the preacher who divorces them makes a serious mistake. Judging by the sermons of successful preachers, the best results are usually obtained by interweaving the two throughout the body of the sermon or by having the application of a given text unit follow immediately upon its exposition." 1.

It is interesting to note the words of Phelps in regards to the place for the application. We disagree with him when he writes that "the compact application at the close is preferable to the interspersed application in the body of the sermon".² He adds, however, - to our approval - that "the general rule is subject to exceptions."² We quote from him in the following, in

1. Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, Vol.5, p.254-55
2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 512

which he gives the exception to the general rule:

"Some discussions require the continuous application. A hortatory discussion, for instance, is nearly all applicatory. Some discussions, though not requiring, may admit of, the continuous application. An expository discussion which is not severely critical is one of this class. In such a sermon the train of thought is secured in place by the text. If dropped for the sake of an applicatory appeal, it may easily be resumed. A biographical or historical discussion admits of a similar freedom of interplay. Such a sermon will commonly follow either the order of biblical narrative, or the order of time. Either of these, if suspended, is easily recovered." 1.

We subscribe to these words of Phelps, and we can also see the advantages, if at times the preacher carries a thread of application through the entire sermon. The subject matter must really determine whether it is all right to do that, however; our advice, if we were to make a general rule, would be that the preacher insert application after each main part in the sermon.

"THE WEDGE" - The close relation of application to exposition brings us to another essential requirement in the development of the practical application, namely, "the fundamental principle that all minor applications in the sermon must be subordinated to, and motivated by, the principle application, the practical objective, of the entire sermon."².

Homileticians picture this as "the wedge" in shaping the application. Ludwig Hofacker, a young preacher of Germany, brings this out clearly when he describes his method of sermon building: "I strive to build my sermons in the shape of a wedge, that is, to drive a wedge into the consciences

1. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 512-13

2. Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, Vol.5, p.254

of my hearers . . . My aim is to make a unified impression upon the hearer in every sermon." ^{1.} The simple meaning of this is that the pastor must strive to attain a unity of application in his sermon; he must make all applications converge upon a single point, and that must be the burning point of the sermon. It is all right to bring in a variety of applications, as the exposition suggests them (inference and remark - to be discussed later), but in applying the truths of the text the pastor must concentrate on one main point, on the main application. As he brings in other applications he must tone them down, so that together with the main application they form a "wedge", the chief practical objective of the sermon predominating.

Dr. Lyman Beecher used to claim that a sermon should have one, and but one, "burning point". This conveys the same idea as the "wedge". Phelps uses a still different picture when he writes that "the conclusion (application) branches out from them (the divisions of the sermon) like the spokes from the hub of a wheel, all fitted to the purpose" ^{2.} of the practical objective of the sermon. Broadus also places a clear picture before us with the comparison that the application "must not diverge in various directions and become like the untwisted cracker of a whip, but should have ^{3.} a common aim and make a combined impression."

If the pastor keeps in mind the importance of this

1. Quoted from Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, Vol. 5, p. 254

2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 526

3. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p. 231

principle of the "wedge" in making minor applications dependent upon the major application, he will accordingly make it his practice to eliminate from his sermon-study all applications suggested by details of the text which are not in line with the main application that dominates the message of the sermon. The result that will necessarily follow from developing applications in the form of the "wedge" will be unity, and unity is a very important element in inspiring the hearers to take home with them the main truth of the text, so that they can nourish their faith with that truth and live that truth. "Unity is so intense and so compact in all earnest discourse, that it will commonly project itself in the application; so that an obedient hearer goes away with the resolve, 'This one thing I do.'^{1.}

B. ESSENTIALS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE APPLICATION
(The Component Parts of the Application)

In order to impress upon the people the practical objective of the text, so that they will leave the church service with the firm determination, "This one thing I do", the pastor must develop the practical application of his sermon in such a manner that he both gives his hearers the necessary information demanded by the truth of the text and inspires them to take action. In order to do this properly, the preacher must carefully bear in mind the component parts of a complete practical application: He must tell the people

I. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 533

what to do; he must tell them how to do it; and he must use the persuasive appeal, directing his applications to the impelling motives of the hearers, in order to inspire them to action. Let us go into some detail, as we discuss these points separately.

WHAT TO DO - In his application the preacher must first of all tell the people what to do. This is the application of the truth of the text in the strict sense of the term, in which the pastor simply applies to the hearers the practical objective of the text, impressing upon them what this truth demands of them and what instructions it gives them. Broadus brings this out well when he writes that the "application, in the strict sense, is that in which we show how the subject applies to the persons addressed, what practical instructions it offers them, what practical demands it makes upon them."^{1.}

How can this practical instruction be effected in the application? In general, homileticians suggest three different ways in which this may be done: remarks, inferences, lessons. The preacher uses "remarks" when he builds his application directly around the truth of the text. By remarks we mean "certain noticeable matters belonging to or connected with the subject, to which attention is now especially directed."^{2.} For instance, say that the pastor is preaching on Justification by Faith. He uses the "remark" successfully - to use a simple illustration - when he applies that truth to the people by instructing them that they must have that faith in order to answer the important question: "What must I do to be

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.280
2. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.280

saved?"

The pastor may also use "inferences" in developing his applications. He uses "inferences" when he builds his application around a logical deduction from the truth of the text. "Nothing should be presented as an inference which does not logically and directly follow from the subject discussed."^{1.} Say, for example, that the minister is preaching on the doctrine that we are saved by grace alone. A logical inference from this subject would then be that we should not trust in our good works for salvation. In using inferences, however, the preacher must take great care to see to it that the inferences follow logically. As an example of questionable logic in making inferences - although not altogether wrong - Phelps lists the following: "The worth of the soul does not follow from its immortality precisely as it follows from the Atonement. The love of God does not follow from the law of the seasons precisely as it follows from the gift of a Savior. The duty of repentance is not urged by the doctrine of providence as potently as it is urged by the doctrine of the cross."^{2.}

The application may also be presented in the form of "lessons". "This term implies that the practical teachings of the subject are more thoroughly brought out and more fully applied than would be indicated by mere 'remarks', while it does not restrict the application to those teachings which appear as logical 'inferences' from the propositions estab-

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p. 281
2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 528

lished." ^{1.} "Lessons" are best used in applications of sermons on historical subjects, where it is lawful to bring out several distinct lessons; these lessons, however, must be closely related - and developed in the form of the "wedge". As an example, say that the pastor is preaching on the historical report of the Flood. In his "lessons" he could bring out the important truths that we must be prepared for the coming destruction of the world, that we must repent, and that we must not delay in our repentance. Or, perhaps he is preaching on the temptation of Christ. A fine lesson that he could draw from that text is that the Christian must be well-versed in Scripture, so that he can fight the temptations of the devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh.

We therefore see that there are various possible ways in which the pastor can tell his hearers "what to do". In a subject of this sort we cannot lay down any hard and fast rules. We merely suggest principles that the truly great preachers used to their practical advantage, and among these principles we find the use of "remarks", "inferences", and "lessons". The pastor who goes about his sermonizing conscientiously uses these principles in developing his practical application - and half of the time he does not even know it. To him the terms "remark", "inference", and "lesson" mean little. His aim is to be practical, and in doing that he uses these principles unconsciously. That is the ideal; all who would be preachers must strive for it!

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.282

We offer another point for the pastor to remember, as he tells the hearers in his application "what to do". It is good to bring the words of the text into this part of the application - and to repeat them as much as possible, especially if the text is short and can be remembered by the people. It is especially effective to end the sermon with the words of the text, after a practical build-up of the application in the conclusion. This will drive the point of the sermon home, make the final impression, so to say, and inspire the believers to walk out of the church door saying to themselves, "This one thing I do!" Pattison emphasizes this in his words: "And we may add that whatever has been the nature of his conclusion, he (the preacher) will do well, oftener than not, to close with the words of his text. Make sure that this shall remain as the final impression."¹

We do not necessarily agree with Pattison when he says that this should be done "oftener than not", since a good thing should not be overdone, but we subscribe to the sentiment of his words when he says that it is a good thing for the pastor (at times) "to close with the words of his text." Broadus writes that "the text itself may be the last words. When the discourse has been developed out of the text, and has exhibited all its wealth of meaning, then the emphatic repetition of the text in closing will impressively sum up all that has been said."²

Spurgeon was very skillful in interweaving and ending

1. Pattison, "Making of the Sermon", p. 182

2. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.287-88

his applications with the words of the text, and as an example of the latter we quote the following from one of his sermons (The reader will also observe, as he reads this excerpt, how Spurgeon in developing his applications shows a fine understanding of the human heart in general, a point that we dwelled upon several chapters back):

"'Come, see the place where the Lord lay' . . . Ye timid ones, do not be afraid to approach, for 'tis no vain thing to remember that timidity buried Christ. Faith would not have given him a funeral at all. Fear buried him. Nicodemus, the night disciple, and Joseph of Arimathe, secretly, for fear of the Jews, went and buried him. Therefore, ye timid ones, ye may go too. Ready-to-halt, poor Fearing, and thou, Mrs. Despondency and Much-afraid, go often there; let it be your favorite haunt, there build a tabernacle, there abide. And often say to your heart when you are in distress and sorrow, 'Come, see the place where the Lord lay.'" 1.

A necessary requirement of that part of the application in which the pastor tells the people "what to do" is that it be interesting. We hardly need stress that. "Inferences and remarks should be developed, if possible, by the use of interesting materials."² They should be made clear by the use of illustrations and examples (We shall discuss this later, under "Illustrations and Examples in the Practical Application") and by the various rhetorical elements that tend to create interest and keep attention (rhetorical question, picturesque language, etc.).

"Barrenness of treatment is nowhere else so great an evil as in the application. Interest elsewhere is of little use, if not sustained here. Interest elsewhere should, if possible, be reduplicated here. Yet some sermons are more interesting everywhere else than here. Some preachers are more

1. Quoted from Pattison, "Making of the Sermon", p. 182

2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 535

inventive, more prolific, more racy, in every other process of sermonizing than in that of applying truth to its practical uses. They explain lucidly, they prove forcibly, they illustrate vividly; but they do not apply truth eloquently. In their applications they never seem fresh. They give the fruit of jaded minds. The conclusion" (application) "falls like the dull, chill pattering of a November rain." 1.

HOW TO DO IT - We have just discussed that part of the application in which the pastor must tell the people "what to do". It will not suffice, however, if the pastor stops there. Many preachers tell the people what they must do, but they often neglect telling them how these duties must be performed. Hence - to use the words in our caption - in applying the practical truth of the text the pastor must tell his hearers "how to do it". He must offer "suggestions as to the best means and methods of practically performing some duty which the body of the discourse has enjoined."² "Many preachers are very insistent in telling their people what they must do in order to comply with the truth taught in the text; . . . yet it never dawns upon them that it is just as necessary, especially in the case of inexperienced Christians, to tell them in detail how these duties may best be performed."³.

In telling the people how to do the duties enjoined in the sermon the pastor must avoid the abstract and use the concrete. He must speak in the language of the people; he must speak of the life of the people; he must meet the practical needs of the people; and in doing this he must offer them explanations and suggestions on the basis of the Word of

1. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 535

2. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p. 283

3. Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, Vol.5, p. 255

God, that will truly show them "how they may, in spite of all their handicaps, reduce to practice what they have learned and thus be enriched by the divine truth which has found access to their souls". We quote Broadus:

"To give good practical suggestions is a task often calling for experience and the fruits of thoughtful observation, and sometimes demanding delicate tact, but is certainly, when well managed, a most important part of the preacher's work. When one has argued some general duty, as that of family or private prayer, of reading the Bible, or of relieving the needy and distressed, it is exceedingly useful to add hints as to the actual doing of the particular duty, so as to make it seem a practical and a practicable thing, so as to awaken hope of doing better, and thus stimulate effort." 2.

We do not try to improve upon these words of Broadus; we do not even add to them, for they explain the matter clearly. We do stress their importance, however; they demand consideration. In concluding this point, let us say that if the pastor learns the art of tactfully telling his hearers "how to do it", he will see that his preaching is getting results; - and, after all, that is most essential, for the people must be inspired to take action.

PERSUASIVE APPEAL - In inspiring the people to take action, however, there is one more very important element in the application that the pastor must observe, and that is commonly called "persuasion", or the "persuasive appeal". The preacher must not only direct his applications to the intellect of the people and instruct them, but he must also aim his applications at the emotions and will of the hearers and accordingly encourage them to act. He must persuade the

1. Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, Vol. 5, p.255
2. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.231

people; he must exhort them to take action and do the duty demanded by the truth of the text. We can pick up almost any book on public speaking and there read that the good speaker must work on the intellect, emotion, and will of the people. It is the same with the sermon.

"Application includes not merely a statement of the practical bearings of the discourse upon the hearers" (what to do), "and instruction as to the actual performance of duties enjoined" (how to do it), "but it also includes, and often especially denotes, persuasive appeal."^{1.} This, says Broadus, "is not generally best accomplished by a mere appeal to the feelings, but by urging, in the first place, some motive or motives for acting, or determining to act, as we propose."^{2.} "Such worthy motives are the love of God and man, obedience, gratitude, the desire to be 'like Him', the joys of Christian service, happiness in this life and in the life to come, and the like."^{3.} We may group these various motives to which the preacher may appeal under the following three heads:

1. Love of God - Primary Motive
2. Happiness --- Secondary Motive
3. Holiness ---- Secondary Motive

The mightiest of all motives - the primary appeal of the pastor of a Christian congregation - is the love of God. In admonishing his hearers to do good works, the pastor must direct his appeal to their God-given duty to show their love to their Savior. He must remind them of all that God has done for them, how He sent His Son into the world to die

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.285

2. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.232

3. Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, Vol.5, p.255

for their sins, and he must impress upon them that out of gratitude for God's love to them, they should show their love to God. "The love of Christ constraineth us," writes the apostle (2 Cor. 5,14); and the pastor, in using persuasive appeal, must show his hearers how their love for Christ must urge them on! Broadus writes:

"We ought to love God supremely, and such supreme love would be our chief motive to do right and to do good. But sin has alienated us from God, so that we do not love Him. And Christ presents Himself, the God-man, the Redeemer, to win our love to Him and thus to God. 'Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake,' are words which reveal the new and mighty gospel motive, love to Christ. To this, above all other motives, the preacher should appeal." 1.

When we say that "love" is the greatest of all appeals, we may also include under this man's love for his fellowmen. In impressing upon his hearers the duties of the second table of the Law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself", the preacher can direct his applications to a powerful, motivating appeal. "We may constantly appeal to men's love of their fellow-men, as a motive for doing right. Parents may be urged to seek personal piety, and higher degrees of it, for the sake of their growing children; and so with the husband or wife, the brother or sister or friend." 2.

A secondary motive to which the pastor may appeal is "happiness". Every man wants to be happy, and if the preacher can show his hearers, on the basis of the Word of God, how they can attain happiness, he will have a strong starting-point in persuading them to believe and live the truth of

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.234
2. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.234

his text. The pastor must remember, however, that this motive should always be subordinated to the "love of God"; but when thus subordinated, it is a legitimate and a powerful motive. As we saw before, when we studied the needs of the human heart in general, people are often despondent, worried, troubled by cares and fears, perplexed by doubts, and consequently very unhappy. Outwardly it may not appear so; inwardly human beings are confronted with soul-struggles. Will not the preacher's words find a sympathetic reception then, if in his practical application he offers his hearers the happiness and peace of heart that only Christ can give them? If the pastor can convince his people that to believe the Gospel and live the Gospel will make them happy, he will win the people - strengthen their faith, build up their hope, and encourage a sanctified life. Under this discussion we mention in particular one very strong secondary appeal, namely, the happiness of heaven. To the troubled Christian, weary of this world, the thought of the happiness awaiting him in heaven gives him great comfort, and as a result he feels more happy and joyful in this life. In using this motive in his persuasive appeal, however, the pastor must heed these words of Broadus: "A desire for the pleasures of piety in this life, or even for the happiness of heaven, would never, of itself alone, lead men to become Christians, or strengthen them to live as such; but combined with other motives, it does a great and useful work."^{1.}

A third impelling motive (secondary) is "holiness". The

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.233

Christian wants to be "holy"; he wants to do good, and every time he falls into manifest sin his conscience goes to work and causes him to be miserable. Even the most abandoned man sometimes wishes to be good; in fact, he even tries to persuade himself in certain respects that he is good, and in general the average man fully intends, after indulging in sinful pleasure "just a little longer", to become thoroughly good before he dies. Man finds it hard to be good, however; there is a constant battle going on within him, - and now we are speaking in particular of the Christian. If the preacher can show the troubled sinner how he can overcome temptation and lead a godly life - how he can be "holy" - he will have a zealous listener. Thus, this "desire for holiness" affords the pastor a fine motive to which to direct the persuasive appeal of his application. In his application the pastor may urge the hearers to "pray unceasingly", to be frequent at the Lord's Table, to keep company with Christians, - depending on the nature of his text - stressing these as important factors in attaining the desired "holiness". "Here then is a great motive to which the preacher may appeal. The thorough depravity of human nature should not make us forget that goodness can always touch at least a faintly responsive chord in the human breast."¹

"We ought to hold up before men the beauty of holiness, to educate the regenerate into doing right for its own sake, and not merely for the sake of its rewards. We ought to stimulate, and at the same time control, that hatred of evil, which is the natural and necessary counterpart to the love of holiness. And as regards the future

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.233

life, we should habitually point men, not only to its happiness, but still more earnestly to its purity, and strive by God's blessing to make them long after its freedom from all sin and from all fear of sinning. Such noble and ennobling aspirations it is the preacher's high duty and privilege to cherish in his hearers, by the very fact of appealing to them." 1.

As said before, however, these secondary motives ("happiness" and "holiness") must be kept subordinate to the primary motive to which the pastor must appeal when directing his applications to Christians, namely, "the love of God".

But what appeals should the pastor make when he is not preaching to a Christian congregation, but rather to a group of unrepentant unbelievers (newly organized mission stations, prisons, bureaus for homeless men, etc.)? How can the preacher reach the impelling motives for action in the life of the unbeliever? In directing his applications to the unchurched, the pastor must earnestly make a proper distinction between Law and Gospel (as we saw when we discussed "The Nature of the Application"). He must first apply the Law to these people; he must show them their sin and their need for a Savior. Then he must point them to the Gospel; after they have learned to know their guilt, he must show them how they can answer the question: "What must I do to be saved?" Phelps speaks of this very matter when he writes:

"What, then, shall we do to break the syncope of inactive guilt? I answer, Do just that which the Scriptures do to such inquirers, - urge anew the motives to repentance. Men repent in obedience to motives. They act under the sway of moral ideas. Press home, then, those ideas which are the natural inducements to repentance. The idea of God, the idea of immortality, the idea of sin, the idea of penal

justice, the idea of the day of judgment, the idea of Christ, the idea of love, the idea of dependence on the Holy Ghost, - these are the great central motive-powers to repentance." 1.

It is desirable at this point to present a few general rules which may prove helpful to the preacher in the construction of the persuasive appeal in his application. There are no set rules for homiletics, of course; so we present the following as mere suggestions. We shall state them briefly, and in each case we shall give proper quotations for proof.

The persuasive appeal should be specific. Broadus gives this advice:

"A concluding exhortation ought, as a rule, to be specific, keeping itself in relation to the subject which has been treated. There is great danger that a fluent and fervid speaker will wander into mere general appeals, equally appropriate to almost any other subject or occasion. This may be sometimes allowable, but a more specific exhortation would almost always be more effective." 2.

What do we mean when we say that the persuasive appeal should be specific? Phelps, who also insists that appeals must be specific, brings this out well in the following:

"Not the sinfulness of sin, not the beauty of holiness, are the Scriptural topics of appeal so frequently as the guilt of covetousness, of pride, of lying, of unbelief, of evil-speaking, of licentious imagination, and the duties of almsgiving, of honest weights, of self-sacrifice, of prayer, of repentance, of faith. The strong points and sharp points of Christian truth are the very points which inspired preachers use most eagerly. On the other hand, the sensitive points of human practice, the festering ulcers of human guilt, those which a deceived conscience covers most carefully from rebuke, are the very points which they attack most mercilessly. To the most saintly devotees of the age they say, 'Ye generation of vipers!' To such, they apply the lancet and the scalpel." 3.

1. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 547
2. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.285
3. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 558-59

There should be variety in the persuasive appeal. "Appeals should possess unbounded versatility. One writer on homiletics prescribes the rule that sermons ought not all to end with the words 'life everlasting.'" ^{1.} Pattison lays down this same general rule when, in tabulating the essentials that should govern the practical application (which he calls "conclusion"), he writes that "the conclusion should be marked by variety". ^{2.} We quote once more from Phelps, who in his "Theory of Preaching" has made a special, detailed study of appeals:

"Hortations should be varied . . . Preachers who have a large range of discussion often narrow that range unconsciously in their conclusions (applications). They adopt favorite ideas, which, with little variation, are wrought into all their exhortations. The favorite of one is death; of another, the day of judgment; of a third, heaven; of a fourth, the proportion of responsibility to privilege; of a fifth, the degeneracy of modern times. The same class of feelings ought not always to be excited by the same class of truths . . . The chief advantage of novelty in preaching is that it touches the sensibilities of hearers in a way in which they were never moved before." ^{3.}

Appeals should be uttered without forwarding. "In the nature of the case, and therefore always, it is unphilosophical to announce an intention of appeal to the feelings." ^{4.}

For example, consider the rhetorical policy of the prophet Nathan in his designs upon the conscience of David. He did not warn him in advance: "Now listen to me, King David! I am going to tell you a little story, in order to make an appeal to your conscience, to awaken your sense of guilt; so that you will fear and tremble and grieve over your sin!" How far would Nathan have gotten, if he would have used such

1. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 571
2. Pattison, "Making of the Sermon", p. 185
3. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 571-72
4. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 297

tactics? In his relations with David, Nathan showed that he was a great preacher. He concealed the entire appeal in making the application of the Truth to the fallen king. He first told his parable, arousing in David genuine hatred of the sin of the rich man, who stole the poor man's lamb, and then he pointed the finger of guilt at David and cried: "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12,7)! In harmony with this practice of Nathan, and in warning against announcing appeals, Phelps gives this important counsel:

"Imagine a speaker, in the pulpit or out of it, saying to you, 'Come now, I am about to excite your emotions: smile, weep, pity, fear, mourn, rejoice, with me'." 1.

"All forewarning of appeals puts hearers at once on the defensive. They gird themselves up, and feel secure from the attack. They are at leisure to look out of their loopholes. An appeal should have the skill and the suddenness of an ambush." 2.

In making appeals it is often good homiletics to use contrast. Say, for example, that the pastor is preaching on "immortality". In making his appeal he could use a striking contrast and direct his appeal to the natural "fear of death" in the average man. Or, if he is preaching on "fear", he could well use the appeal to "hope" in his application. In employing such contrast, however, the preacher must use great care; for contrast is not desirable where the material introduced by it is relatively feeble. Considered in itself, however, contrast is a "natural mode of suggestion and impression. It does not necessarily impair unity of impression. It may heighten the impression of unity. Contrasted inferences, therefore, may be desirable in conclusions (applications)." ³ We quote

1. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 297

2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 574-75

3. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 531

from Broadus:

"When the sermon has been one of warning or of invitation, it is sometimes natural and impressive to conclude with something of the opposite tendency. The preacher must judge in every case, whether this combination will deepen the general impression, or whether the two will neutralize each other in the hearer's mind, and leave him unaffected by either." 1.

The persuasive appeal of the application may at times be strengthened by making separate appeals to separate groups of people. In his application the preacher should strive to individualize his hearers. "Happy is the preacher who is able to individualize his hearers, so that each one believes that he himself is especially addressed."² The pastor can better do this, if his subject matter permits and if his audience is large enough, by directing special applications to special groups with special needs. The great danger here is that the pastor may become too personal and single out one or two people; so that everyone knows of whom he is speaking. That is poor homiletics, especially if the preacher is rebuking sin. If done with care, however, the pastor may apply the Word to separate groups to great advantage; he will add power to his appeals; he will "individualize" his hearers.

The question may be asked: To what special groups may we direct special applications? If the pastor finds it difficult to divide his congregation into different groups which may need special applications, we suggest, first of all, as we mentioned once before, that the pastor conduct regular pastoral visitations. In addition, however, the preacher will find it profitable in this connection to study the book entitled

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p. 285

2. Pattison, "Making of the Sermon", p. 369

"Personal Evangelism", by A.W. Knock.¹ We present the headings of the table of contents from Part II of this book, in order to give the reader an idea of how the people may be divided into various groups according to their needs; the careless and indifferent, the procrastinator; the self-righteous; the earnest inquirer; those lacking assurance; those lacking victory over sin; the hesitant and fearful; those with difficulties; those having lost hope; the fault-finders; the objectors. In making special appeals to certain of these groups, according to the nature of the subject, the pastor will give strength and lend weight to the persuasive appeal of his practical application; for he will better be able to "individualize" the members of his flock.

Another important factor for the preacher to remember in working out his persuasive appeal is that he possess the expectations of success in his appeals.

"Appeals should be so constructed as to imply the expectation of success. This suggests one of the subtle pivots on which the success of an exhortation often turns. The general principle of character, that hopeful men are successful men, applies with special pertinence to the effort of one mind to win the obedient sensibilities of another. In this, more surely than in many other things, men who expect to succeed do succeed." 2.

In concluding our discussion on appeals, we mention one more point: The persuasive appeal must come from the heart, and it must be directed to the heart!

"There should always, if at all possible, be an earnest appeal to the heart; for 'out of the heart are the issues of life' (Prov. 4, 23) . . . Appeals . . . dare not be studied, artificial, insincere. In order to reach the heart of the hearer,

1. The Lutheran Bible Institute, 1619 Portland Ave., Minn., Minn.
2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 565

the appeal must proceed out of the very depths of the preacher's heart." 1.

Thy heart must overflow, if thou
another's heart wouldst reach,
It needs the overflow of soul,
to give the lips full speech.

1. Friedrich, "Practical Application", GTU, Vol.5, p.255-56

VI. ILLUSTRATIONS AND EXAMPLES IN THE APPLICATION

In the previous chapter we mentioned briefly that the preacher should strive to make the practical application of his sermon interesting. In order to do this effectively, homileticians suggest the use of illustrations and examples in the application. The illustration secures attention and creates interest; it makes truth lifelike and vivid; it explains; it gives genuine aid to the reasoning powers; it aids the memory; it gives pleasure to the audience by arousing fine emotion; it gets hold of the inattentive and careless.¹ The example is the best illustration for the application; it makes the application more concrete.

When using the illustration in the application, however, the preacher (and the young preacher should especially heed this note of warning) should never build the application around the illustration.

"A young preacher was, not long ago, very flatteringly recommended to the vacant pulpit of a large Presbyterian church in a Western city. The chairman of the committee of supply wrote to inquire about his character when a member of this seminary. 'We have heard,' wrote the keen judge of good preaching, 'that Mr. B--- constructs his sermons by first collecting a number of telling illustrations, and then builds his sermon around them. Is this true? If it is, he is not the man for us.' The man in question, it is true, was noted for his illustrative invention. It was disproportionately developed as related to his reasoning power. Some sagacious hearer had detected the disproportion, and had fastened upon him the label of the criticism I have quoted. It may require years to enable him to outlive it." 2.

The lesson that this incident leaves with us is very

1. Spurgeon's seven purposes in the use of the illustration
2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 525-26

clear; it lays down a fine homiletical rule.

The illustration in the application must have a practical effect. "If it serves no better purpose than to excite feeling which exhausts itself with no practical effect, an illustration is a hindrance and not a help"¹ to the application.

It goes without saying, of course, that the illustration should be apparent at once; and hence it should be taken from scenes or circumstances familiar to the audience. The observance of such a practice will greatly assist in reaching the desired practical effect of the illustration in the application. Jesus was a master at this. To show how the Savior used familiar pictures in his preaching, we quote from Archdeacon Farrar:

In his illustrations Jesus used "the most everyday articles of food and furniture, the commonest incidents of life, the most ordinary scenes and sounds of nature. The hen and her chickens, the leaking wine-skins of the vintner, the burning of autumn weeds, the peasant woman patching the old clothes of her husband or her boys, were not too trivial to be turned into themes for divine instruction by the Lord of glory. Such teaching is ever real and fresh and vivid." 2.

Illustrations of the sort that the Savior used quicken the apprehension of the truth. That should be the primary purpose of all illustrations and examples in the practical application of the sermon. Dr. Guthrie writes:

"By awakening and gratifying the imagination, the truth finds its way more readily to the heart and makes a deeper impression on the memory. The story, like a float, keeps it from sinking; like a nail, fastens it in the mind; like the feather

1. Pattison, "Making of the Sermon", p. 284

2. Archdeacon Farrar; quoted from Pattison, p. 285

of an arrow, makes it strike; and like the barb, makes it stick." 1.

"Notice how even in enforcing the advantages of illustrating, Guthrie uses four illustrations. Who after reading these sentences can forget that illustrations float, hold fast, strike, and stick?"² Below we shall give an example of how the illustration may be used in the application to quicken the apprehension of the truth. The purpose of this illustration is to show how "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8, 28):³

An artist was once frescoing the lofty ceiling of a church, and, gradually stepping back on the scaffolding to watch the effect of his work, he became so absorbed in his picture that he did not notice that he was about to step off the edge and fall upon the pavement far below. A brother artist, seeing his danger, and knowing that a word would but hasten his fall, threw his brush at the picture, spoiling it. The painter, indignant, rushed forward and was saved! So God sometimes throws the brush of His mercy and destroys the pictured hopes of our hearts. Why? Why does he do it? Not for our ruin, but He does it for our good! - perhaps to startle us from sin, perhaps to shake some sense into us, perhaps to preserve our bodies - but always to save our souls! "All things work together for good to them that love God!"

Our purpose in presenting the above illustration is to show the possibilities of how the illustration can be used in the application to quicken the apprehension of the truth. In the following we shall quote a few instances of how different types of preachers successfully effected this purpose by using illustrations and examples in their applications.

1. Dr. Guthrie, quoted from Pattison, "Making of the Sermon", p.268
2. Pattison, "Making of the Sermon", p. 269
3. The thought for this illustration was extracted from Denton's "Topical Illustrations", p.15. In this connection it is in order to mention that the preacher should not make it a habit to rely on such cyclopedias of illustrations.

Spurgeon:- He was a Christian preacher, a Fundamentalist.

His sermons are homiletically excellent, and his use of the illustration in the application accordingly shows the touch of a master. We quote from one of his sermons on "Prayer":

"Cold prayers are like arrows without heads, swords without edges, birds without wings; they pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven. Those prayers that have no heavenly fire in them always freeze before they reach as high as heaven; but fervent prayer is very prevalent with God." 1.

Talmage:- He was an evangelist, a revivalist that preached to out-door gatherings of broken-down men. In general, his sermons are homiletically poor. He does not expound the text, but rather uses the text as a "pretext". His sermons lack definite parts and a definite "fundamentum dividendi". Talmage has become famous, however, because of his use of the illustration in the application. We quote from one of his sermons (and this sermon, by the way, is homiletically good; otherwise we would not even pause to quote Talmage) to show how he uses the example in his application, the appeal being to trust in the Lord for divine preservation:

"St. Felix escaped martyrdom by crawling through a hole in the wall across which the spiders immediately afterward wove a web. His persecutors saw the hole in the wall, but the spider's web put them off the track. A boy was lost by his drunken father, and could not for years find his way home. Nearly grown, he went into a Fulton street prayer-meeting and asked for prayers that he might find his parents. His mother was in the room, and rose, and recognized her long-lost son. Do you say that these things 'only happened so'? Tell that to those who do not believe in a God and have no faith in the Bible. Do not tell it to me. I said to an aged minister of much experience, 'All events of my life seem to have been divinely connected. Do you suppose it

is so in all lives?' He answered, 'Yes, but most people do not notice the divine leadings.' I stand here to say from my own experience that the safest thing in all the world to do is to trust the Lord." 1.

Fosdick:- Whereas Spurgeon was a Fundamentalist and Talmage a revivalist, in Fosdick we have an outspoken Modernist. Fosdick is a master-homiletician, however, and his use of the illustration and the application is greatly to be commended. We mention him as a third type of preacher who successfully uses the illustration in the application. We quote from his sermon on "The Open Doors", from the text, "Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it" (Rev. 3,8):

"Do you remember from our childhood those exciting stories where the hero of the tale was almost caught, his enemies were closing in, the trap was almost sprung, and, lo! a secret door through which in the nick of time he made his thrilling exit? In later life we have seen that happen often, in ways just as thrilling and twice as true. Blindness closes in on a man's life. He has been active and energetic. Now the doors shut on every side. Avenues of action and vistas of vision close. He seems caught like a rat in a trap. And then comes that spiritual miracle before which all men with eyes must stand with reverence and awe. He is not caught like a rat in a trap. There is an open door. Sight dimmed but insight deepened, he becomes inwardly beautiful so that, whereas once he was outwardly active, he becomes radiant within, and men and women draw closer to him in the walk of life that they may be reassured about the reality of the spiritual life. He, too, has heard a voice: 'Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.'" 2.

What a wonderful opportunity Fosdick had to present the true Gospel of the Crucified! What a pity such a gifted homiletician should be a Modernist! Yet, we must admire him for his ability in using the illustration in the application;

1. Talmage, "Selected Sermons", Vol.1, p. 189-90
2. Fosdick, quoted from mimeographed copy of Dr. Fosdick's sermon, p.3

all of his sermons show the same careful, artful workmanship as is evident in the sermon we have quoted.

Maier:- He is a fourth type of preacher who skillfully uses the illustration and example in his practical applications. Dr. Maier is a radio-preacher. Unlike Spurgeon and Foadick - and in a certain sense Talmage - he has no definite congregation that he can study. His sermons must appeal to the unchurched American public. They are by no means exegetical masterpieces; they are not meant to be. In his use of the application, however - and more particularly of the illustration in the application - he ranks as one of the greatest preachers of his type in America. We quote from his Lenten sermon on "Thy Will Be Done", in which he makes a strong appeal by using the example in his practical applications:

"Are you one of the millions in the cruel day who have suffered from the dishonesty and the greed of your fellow-men? Think of George Neumark's heroism. After he had been robbed of practically all his property with the exception of his prayer-book, he sat down, a penniless and destitute student, to pen these immortal lines of trust in God:

"If thou but suffer God to guide thee
And hope in Him through all thy days,
He'll give thee strength whate'er betide thee,
And bear thee through the evil days."

"Is your home broken by quarrel and hatred, and are your dreams of a happy family life shattered by the cruel reality of strife? John Wesley lived in an unhappy marriage for thirty years. His wife rose up publicly to ridicule him even while he was preaching. She resorted to libel and forgery in the demoniacal desire to ruin his career. An eye-witness tells us that he once found Mrs. Wesley foaming with fury, clutching in her hand the hair she had torn from her husband's head. Yet the more violent the storm of his domestic troubles, the more tightly John Wesley clung to the Cross and, translating the gems of European hymns, he gave us this psalm of resignation:

"Leave to God's sov'reign sway
To choose and to command;
So shalt thou, wondering, own His way,
How wise, how strong, His hand." 1.

VII. THE DELIVERY OF THE APPLICATION

When the preacher delivers the practical application of his sermon, he must bear in mind that he is speaking directly to the hearts of the people. Hence, he must be natural in his delivery; he must use a natural elocution.

"Appeals, above all other utterances of the pulpit, demand a natural elocution. The close contact implied in direct hortation needs to avoid all possibly repellent adjuncts of speech. Nowhere else, therefore, is unnatural delivery so hurtful."¹

To reach the hearts of the people, however, the preacher must also deliver his applications with feeling. True, he must feel everything he says in his sermon, but it is all the more important in the application, since he is applying the word of God directly to the needs of his hearers; he is aiming at the heart.

"It is a matter of universal observation that a speaker who would excite deep feeling must feel deeply himself. Demosthenes sometimes spoke with such passionate earnestness that his enemies said he was deranged. Cicero says that it is only passion that makes the orator a king; that, though he himself had tried every means of moving men, yet his successes were due, not to talent or skill, but to a mighty fire in his soul so that he could not contain himself; and that the hearer would never be kindled, unless the speech came to him burning."²

We agree with the words quoted above that the preacher must speak with "passionate earnestness". That does not mean, however, that he must shout and go into an emotional frenzy in the pulpit. Young preachers frequently make that mistake.

1. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p. 566

2. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p. 236

They read in books on public speaking and homiletics that the speaker must speak with "intense feelings", and then they interpret this suggestion as meaning that they should scream and rave in the pulpit. That is not what the homileticians mean when they say that we should speak with "feeling". The pastor can put "feeling" into his words and still speak in a very subdued voice. In this connection, let us heed the two warnings of Broadus:

1. "And whatever the subject might require, let a man not speak in an emotional manner unless he really feels it. An effort to work oneself up into feeling, because it is desirable at this point, will usually fail; and if it succeeds as to the preacher himself, will be apt to make anything else than a good impression on the hearers . . .

2. "And let it never be forgotten that we must not aim to excite emotion merely for its own sake, as if that were the end in view, but to make it a means of determining the will and stimulating to corresponding action. Even love to God will not subsist as a mere feeling." 1.

Thus, we have seen that the preacher must speak with a natural feeling. The question may be asked, however: What if the preacher does not have this feeling? What can he do to develop it? In order to speak with power and feeling, the preacher must be consecrated; he must have a zeal to win souls for Christ. The only training school in which to develop that consecrated zeal for the work of the kingdom is the Word of God. The preacher must study the Word; he must pray the Word; he must live the Word; he must observe the principles of faith and life laid down in the Word, both in his own life and in his relation with his fellow-men.

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.284

Broadus has this very thing in mind when he writes:

"Alas! it is often our chief difficulty in preaching to feel ourselves as we ought to feel. And a genuine fervor cannot be produced to order by an effort of will. We must cultivate our religious sensibilities, must keep our souls habitually in contact with gospel truth, and maintain, by the union of abundant prayer and self-denying activity, that ardent love to God and that tender love to man which will give us, without an effort, true pathos and passion." 1.

In conclusion, we must mention one more necessary requirement for the successful application of the Word of God to the hearts of the hearers. As the preacher applies the truth of his text to the people, he must remember and take comfort and assurance from the fact that the Holy Spirit is working through the Word that he preaches. "An expectant appeal implies the preacher's assurance of the presence of the Holy Spirit. All hopeful preaching implies that. Hopeful preaching honors the Spirit of God: God, in return, honors it." ^{2.} Hence, we say with De Pressense: "I would not forget that above all these human methods of preaching, which we have no right to neglect, we must wait upon God for the influence of His mighty Spirit, without whose sovereign virtue our poor words will be but as the tinkling cymbal striking the air with empty sound."^{3.} In other words, "the real application of the text, the effective application, must be made by the Holy Spirit. And this is one of the reasons why every Christian sermon must be begun, continued, and ended in prayer."^{4.}

1. Broadus, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons", p.237
2. Phelps, "Theory of Preaching", p.566
3. De Pressense, "Hom. Rev.", 3, 53
4. Friedrich, "Practical Application", CTM, Vol. 5, p.256

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