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## The Personal Factor in Preaching

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Gomer's children, symbolical of the fate of apostate Israel, are alluded to, to indicate that the curse has been lifted, the wrath of God has disappeared. Again, in New Testament times there shall be a great people of Israel, sown by God, having obtained mercy from Him, acknowledged by Him as His people, while they rejoice in Him who is indeed their God. Peace shall reign on earth again; for God in Christ reconciled the world unto Himself, magnifying His holy name, the Lord Jehovah of mercy and of truth. THEO. LAETSOH.

(To be continued.)

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## The Personal Factor in Preaching.

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There is only one eternal and unchanging truth in the world, and that truth is the Word of God. In words of surpassing beauty and power St. Peter writes: "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, *which liveth and abideth forever*. For all flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth away; but *the Word of the Lord endureth forever*," 1 Pet. 1, 23—25. Cp. John 17; Rom. 10. This is the Word which, as Peter states in concluding the chapter, "by the Gospel is preached unto you." To this preaching the Church of Christ and every church worthy of the name is committed. It means the constant repetition of the great motto of St. Paul's life: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified," 1 Cor. 2, 2. It means the unequivocal stand against all falsifiers of the truth. "If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed," Gal. 1, 9.

But while we stand committed to this unchanging principle, we are fully aware of the fact that changing conditions make constant adjustments of the form of presentation of the truth to new circumstances necessary. If this were not the case, all church confessions, all symbolical books, would be superfluous. The doctrine of the deity of Christ is clearly taught in both the Old Testament and the New; yet it was necessary, not absolutely, but relatively, to have not only the Apostolic Creed, but the Nicene and the *Symbolum Quicunque* as well. The various doctrines which were submerged between the sixth and the sixteenth centuries are all clearly taught in Scripture, yet it was necessary, again not absolutely, but relatively, to add the confessions of the era of the Reformation as they are now contained in the Book of Concord of the Lutheran Church. The arguments of these confessions meet the changed conditions and false applications of the entire medieval age. The inspiration of the Bible, the power of the Sacraments, the universal priesthood of all believers,

and many other doctrines are clearly taught in the Bible, yet new heresies arising from time to time or old heresies appearing in new garb make it necessary for the Church of the pure Word and confession to analyze the errors of false teachers and to emphasize the truth of God's eternal Word to this day. It is in this sense that constant adjustments in the form of presentation of the eternal truth are necessary; this is one of the reasons why Christ instituted a *personal* ministry, an office held by human beings in the midst of human beings.

We are living in the age of intensive and extensive church publicity. The need of advertising is being felt and for that reason is also being urged with a vigor which often amounts to an accusation of the quiet methods of days gone by. Every form of printed advertising is being used, from door-knob "throw-aways" to page ads in metropolitan newspapers. Even where the church-building is still on a side street, the bulletin-board at least has been moved to the main street. And all over the country individual congregations and church-bodies are making every attempt to capture some part of a radio broadcast.

Practically all of this publicity is eminently worth while and should undoubtedly find its support in the proper proportion to other expenditures, *provided it remains merely a means to an end* and does not become an end in itself. The Great Commission should be emphasized by all means; for it is quite evident that we are far from realizing the possibilities of mission expansion in any degree commensurate with the missionary needs of this or any other land. Yet it would be a misapplication of the parable of the Lost Sheep if we should say that each and every pastor should leave the ninety and nine to shift for themselves while he goes out to seek the one lost sheep. The Word of God says to the pastors of the individual congregations: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof," 1 Pet. 5, 2; and again: "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the Church of God," Acts 20, 28. Only very rarely and only for short times will it be possible for the pastor in charge of a congregation to leave his ninety and nine in order to seek the one lost sheep. It is true that most pastors can participate in mission-work in their respective territories, and *they can without exception institute and direct such work*; but this may not be done to the neglect of the flock to whose oversight the Lord has called them. The Church is following a very wise course in heeding the example of the Apostolic Age, in which special evangelists or missionaries, as they are now more properly called, were commissioned to seek the lost, whether unchurched in our own country or heathen in foreign countries. And the same objective is served by the various advertising or publicity features of the Church.

In considering these points, we are bound to be aware of a double danger attending our publicity efforts, always assuming, of course, that none of these undertakings, not even radio-preaching, pretends to take the place of the regular indoctrination and the growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which is the outstanding feature of a congregation's work. The one danger is that every form of specific confession is eliminated in the presentation; in other words, that the advertising has only a general Christian cast or complexion. From beginning to end the Word of God criticizes the trumpet with an uncertain sound, which will not cause men to choose an issue and to abide by it. There is nothing in the behavior of Christ, or Paul, or Peter, or even John which would permit us to think of their work in terms of equivocation. Their presentation, although invested with the highest form of inviting kindness, was nevertheless clean-cut throughout. "There was a division among them," applies not only to John 9, but also to the preceding chapters, 5, 43 ff.; 5, 61 ff.; 7, 43; 8, 30 ff. If an actual testimony for Christ is lacking in this feature, that it presents an alternative, it does not measure up to the standards of the Scriptures. — The second danger connected with much of the modern publicity work is this, that elements or factors of personality are emphasized at the expense of the message itself. It cannot be denied that the possibility of substituting oratorical blandishments for sound Biblical arguments looms very great. It is of the last days of the world that St. Paul speaks when he describes men as having itching ears, the immediate consequence of this pathological state being that they would be inclined to turn away from the truth and to be turned to fables.

On the strength of all these factors we ask, What rules ought we to observe with regard to *the personal element in preaching*? What suggestions are to be found in Scriptures? What examples are held out before us?

Speaking, first of all, for the side of the preacher, we find that the personal element in the preacher is recognized in Scriptures as a corollary of the position to which he is called. God gives a man to a congregation as pastor, or He places him in a position in the Church (call in the derived sense of the word), so that his abilities, his talents, may find their application in that particular place or position. One of the most amazing characteristics of the Bible is this, that its various books were not written in the same style, with the same vocabulary. We find a most stimulating diversity in this respect. Isaiah and Micah were contemporary prophets, and there is a certain parallelism in their respective messages which is apparent even to the casual reader. The stately beauty of Isaiah's prophecies, their lofty eloquence and sustained power, are apparent from the

"great arraignment" of the first chapter and the "inaugural vision" of chapter 6 to the evangelical strains of the "book of comfort," culminating, as it does, in the proclamation of the Servant of Jehovah. On the other hand, the imagination of Micah has none of the overwhelming vividness of Isaiah. His is a directness and plainness of speech which accords well with his sympathy for the oppressed as well as with his twofold mission of declaring the essentials of religion and of expounding the Gospel of the promised Deliverer. — Again, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel were contemporary prophets, and some of the messages of the first two concerned the same circumstances, the conditions preceding the fall of Jerusalem. Yet the manner in which Jeremiah speaks is entirely unlike that in which Ezekiel treats similar topics, such as the disobedience and the obstinacy of the people, while Daniel, who refers to conditions of this type, particularly in the second part of his book, nevertheless presents his message in an altogether different form. To each man was given his special talent, his particular ability, for a specific purpose. The nucleus of their message was the same, especially as it pertained to the proclamation of the Messiah and the fundamental facts of faith; but there were diversities of gifts.

The same is true of the New Testament and its writers. The difference is apparent even in the synoptic gospels, whose similarity is otherwise so marked in sections. We have the expository method of Matthew next to the vivacious style of Mark and the graceful beauty of Luke. In the letters of the apostles we have, on the one hand, the dialectic presentation of Paul, his often inexorable logic, combined with his irresistible personal appeal in the interest of the central doctrine of faith, justification by faith alone, and, on the other hand, the simplicity of John's language, combined with a depth of thought which often leaves the student floundering in amazement in his efforts to plumb the depth, and length, and depth, and height of the unsearchable riches of God. We have, on the one hand, the picturesque beauty of Peter's epistles of hope, with their background of personal contact with Christ, and we have, on the other hand, the didactic simplicity of the proverbs of James, with their apt illustrations and fitting applications. Even the quaint letter of Jude and the anonymous letter to the Hebrews have their own style, their own charm, their particular appeal.

Not only did the Lord make use of this variety of gifts, both native and imparted in the case of His own inspired writers, but He pursued the same course in establishing and maintaining the congregations which were the result of the missionary zeal of the early Christians. We are expressly told that both in Southern Galatia and in Crete the individual congregations were supplied with pastors, evidently to take care of their individual needs. Even when

the Lord sent special messages to specific congregations through one of His chosen apostles, as in Rev. 2 and 3, the personal element is obvious in the background that is sketched as well as in the message that is delivered.

This second factor, the personal element on the part of those for whom the message is intended, is apparent in every letter of the New Testament collection. In the letters to the congregation at Thessalonica we clearly have before us the picture of a newly established flock of Christians, many of whom were recruited from the Gentiles, whose first contact with Christianity and its lofty ideals might easily result in an emotional reaction, throwing them off their balance. Conditions in Corinth, in a measure, resembled those of Thessalonica, since both congregations were predominantly Gentile, and yet Paul's letters to the Christians in the metropolis of Achaia take into consideration the special difficulties of the cosmopolitan population of Corinth, as a consequence of which his entire letters breathe a personal spirit different from others. The same is true in possibly an even greater measure in the letter to the Galatians, parts of which are like the rushing of the waters when a mighty dam breaks under a strain too long imposed. The letter to the Romans, on the other hand, although probably written about the same time and taking into consideration the changed complexion of the congregation in the great capital, is much more quiet and persuasive in its argumentation. Its message is universal, but its background cannot be separated from Rome. As we go on to the so-called captivity letters of Paul, which were written under conditions which did not vary appreciably for two years, it is most interesting to find nevertheless that the apostle takes into account the circumstances in each of the congregations addressed. The letter to the Ephesians has been called the least personal epistle of St. Paul; but even here we find the background of the *ἐκκλησία*, as the very center of the discussion pertains to the doctrine of the Church. Cp. Acts 19, 39. 41. In the letter to the Colossians the apostle takes up the peculiar difficulties which were threatening the spiritual life of the congregation. The eternal truths do not differ from those stated in Ephesians, but the background of the presentation is furnished by the situation which had been brought to the attention of the apostle by Epaphras. In the case of the letter to the Philippians we have still another picture; for, as some one has aptly stated, we have in this letter the reflection of the Roman pride in the citizenship of the capital of the world and in the *ius Italicum*, granted to the inhabitants of the great Roman colony in Eastern Macedonia.

It must be evident to every student of the Bible, even on the basis of this brief survey, that the personal element is an outstanding feature of the manner in which the great message of salvation was brought to the attention of men everywhere. On the one hand, God

gave the diversities of gifts for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, Eph. 4, 12 (cp. 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12). And on the other hand, He Himself, through His chosen inspired servants, applied the great truths of sin and grace, of the salvation wrought through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, to each congregation according to its needs, in agreement with its condition, in view of the special difficulties with which it was battling.

This is the principle and example which we must keep in mind in all the work that we are doing in and for the Church. To this day God gives talents and gifts according to the pleasure of His good and gracious will. The list in Rom. 12 need not be abridged nor even that of 1 Cor. 12, for His hand is in no way shortened. Though the immediate call of Biblical times has been superseded by the mediate call exercised by the Christian congregation, it is God who places the workers in their respective positions and fields. They are, each and every one of them, to do business with the talents entrusted to them. They are to exert themselves to the best of their ability in applying the eternal truths and principles to their charges. Generally speaking, every sermon should be made for a particular congregation. It is written that a servant of the Lord should rightly divide the Word of Truth, an admonition which refers indeed first of all to the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, but also to the proper application of the Word to the needs of every congregation. Our Lord Jesus Himself calls him a faithful steward who gives to all members of the household their meat in due season, Luke 12, 42. To apply these and other passages to private pastoral work alone is to limit their scope, as the example of Holy Scripture shows. The personal element in the minister should have as its corollary the personal element in the congregation.

But let us not forget, in emphasizing this feature, that the presence of this personal element may under no circumstances be utilized as a lever for personal aggrandizement. The ideal situation in a congregation (and also in a church-body) is that in which every worker for Christ eliminates himself and all hopes of personal honor and glory. Let the people forget the messenger if they only retain the message. Says John the Baptist: "I am not the Christ. . . . He must increase, but I must decrease," John 3, 28, 30. Says the Apostle Paul: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake," 2 Cor. 4, 5; and again: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified," 1 Cor. 2, 2; and again: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me," 1 Cor. 15, 10. That is the attitude of a true servant of Christ.

P. E. KRETZMANN.