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## Doctrinal Preaching

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## Doctrinal Preaching.

"In a restless nation and agitated times, in these days of somewhat bustling religious activity, there has come to be too little of real doctrinal preaching." This description of conditions and the complaint concerning too little doctrinal preaching, all of which so well fits our own time, was not written by one of our contemporaries, but is a quotation from the book *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, by Broadus, page 77, published in 1870. Turning to Walther's *Pastoraltheologie*, published in 1872, we find that Dr. Walther made a similar complaint. He says: "Although a sermon may be filled with words of admonition, rebuke, and consolation, yet, if that sermon contains no doctrine, it is an empty and a poor sermon, all of its admonitions, rebukes, and consolations floating in the air. And no one knows how many preachers are guilty and how much they sin in this respect." Must we not also to-day complain that doctrinal preaching is being neglected? Experience teaches that in the very measure in which the teaching of Bible doctrine has been eliminated from the preaching of the Church, in that measure has the Church lacked virility and power.

### I.

What is doctrinal preaching? Some will readily answer, The preaching of doctrine. The answer is correct, but not sufficient. Such statements as "Christ died for our sins" or "We are saved by grace through faith" are doctrinal statements, and yet a sermon that has such statements merely interwoven is not yet a doctrinal sermon. A doctrinal sermon calls for the thorough exposition of some Biblical doctrine or phase of that doctrine. Moreover, doctrinal preaching calls for the preaching of all the doctrines of Scripture.

Of course, the chief doctrines must be preached first and more frequently, such as the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, the purpose and use of the Scriptures, the atonement, justification by faith, conversion, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, the person and the work of the Holy Spirit, good works as the evidence of faith, the Christian Church, the Christian ministry, false prophets, the trials and sufferings of a Christian, the resurrection, the Judgment, eternal life. But also such doctrines should be preached as the creation and preservation of the world, the angels, predestination, the giving and taking of offense, brotherly remonstrance, marriage, the Christian training of children, the divine institution of civil government, the relation of master and servant, Christian liberty, adiophora, sinful amusements, the oath, the dangers of riches, the mysterious ways of God in the life of a Christian, etc. A Christian preacher should be able to say with Paul, Acts 20, 20. 26. 27, "I kept back nothing that

was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly and from house to house. . . . Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

## II.

From the viewpoint of the purpose of the sermon we may classify sermons as doctrinal, pastoral, and hortatory. The distinction we make is not that some sermons contain doctrine and others do not. Every sermon must contain both doctrine and the application of doctrine. Doctrine without application does not serve its purpose; and application of doctrine cannot be made without a knowledge of the doctrine. But while the pastoral sermon stresses particularly the *application* of doctrine to the Christian life, as does also the hortatory sermon, the doctrinal sermon is *mainly* an *exposition* of some Scriptural doctrine or, usually, of a certain phase of some doctrine. The purpose of the doctrinal sermon is fully to acquaint the hearers with the doctrines of the Scriptures, or, as we say, to indoctrinate them. The doctrinal sermon offers a popular course in dogmatics.

The importance of a thorough indoctrination and, therefore, of the preaching of doctrinal sermons is readily understood and appreciated when it is borne in mind that doctrine constitutes the basic part of Scripture. The fivefold use of Scripture is given in 2 Tim. 3, 16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," and Rom. 15, 4: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." We therefore, according to the Latinized Greek terminology speak of the *usus didascalicus*, *elenchiticus*, *paedeuticus*, *epanorthoticus*, and *paracleticus*. The following outline will help both the understanding and the memory:—

### The Use of Scripture —

Doctrine	{	Teaches <i>true</i> doctrine.	Life	{	Corrects <i>sinful</i> life.
		Refutes <i>false</i> doctrine.			Encourages <i>godly</i> life.
					Comforts in <i>troubles</i> of life.

The *usus didascalicus* is not only mentioned first by Paul, but is *basic for all the other* uses of Scripture. False doctrine can be refuted only on the basis of the true doctrine; a sinful life can be corrected and a godly life encouraged only on the basis of the doctrines of sin and of good works; and comfort can be dispensed only on the basis of whatever doctrine comes into consideration in a specific case. Timothy is told to "preach the Word," especially "sound doctrine," 2 Tim. 4, 2, 3. Likewise Titus is told "to speak the things which become sound doctrine," Titus 2, 1. Read also Heb. 5, 12; 6, 2;

2 John 9—11; Gal. 1, 6—12. The major part of Paul's Epistle to the Romans consists of doctrine, chapters 1—11. Compare also the preaching recorded in the Book of Acts.

Only by the preaching of doctrine can a congregation be kept in good spiritual condition. Bible doctrine is the substantial spiritual food that a Christian needs for his spiritual welfare, sustaining and strengthening his faith and giving him power to resist sin and live a life that is pleasing to God. Every successful preacher has been a preacher of doctrine. It does not speak well for a preacher when the members of his congregation in the course of years still are babes in doctrine and have not doctrinally advanced to men of full age, Heb. 5, 12—14.

The importance of doctrinal preaching ought to be so self-evident to a Christian preacher as to need no further elaboration. But serious mistakes are made, and many fruitless admonitions, exhortations, and warnings are given because the fact is ignored that for all its teaching, of whatever kind it may be, the Church needs the pure doctrine of the Scriptures as the basis; otherwise, as Walther says, the warnings and admonitions will "float in the air." Many admonitions to do good works do not produce such because the preacher has forgotten that justifying faith is the root of all true morality. It is to the doctrine of justification by faith that the preacher must ever again revert if he would successfully encourage his people to avoid sin and lead a godly life.

By way of illustration: In spite of the present economic condition, a large proportion of our church-members could give the little money that is needed for the work of the Church, but many are not doing so. Pastors complain that their preaching fails to open the purse-strings of their people, although, so the preachers tell us, they are telling their people of the needs of the Church and are pleading with them to supply those needs. We shall do well to examine our preaching in the light of that of Paul. When Paul encouraged the Corinthians to make liberal contributions, he said: "Therefore, as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others and to prove the sincerity of your love. 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," 2 Cor. 8, 7—9. Paul urged Christian giving on the basis of the doctrine of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and encouraged the Corinthians by the giving of their gifts to show the sincerity of their love to their Savior. A Christian whose heart is filled with the love of Christ will not spend his money for pleasure and luxuries and then plead poverty when he is asked to give to

the Lord, Hag. 1, 2—5; Mal. 3, 8. Because the very poor Macedonians had first given themselves to the Lord, therefore they gave their money "to their power and beyond their power," 2 Cor. 8, 1—5. When the line of demarcation between church-members and the people of this world is in many cases hard to detect; when our church-members set their affections upon the things of this earth instead of on the things above; when our church-members have little knowledge of the affairs of the kingdom of God and take little interest in them; when our church-members are attracted more by the glories of the world than by the glory of Christ; when all this is true, we need not be surprised that such church-members spend many a dollar on things other than the necessities of life—personal conveniences, expensive dress and entertainment, pleasure and amusements, and the like, Hag. 1, 2—4, while at the same time they permit their Church and their Savior to go begging for the very few dollars that are needed for the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom, for the salvation of souls. Not until more hearts are filled with the love to Christ, will the deficits be paid in our church treasuries and sufficient funds be supplied to cover the needs. Less preaching of money and more preaching of the love of Christ will produce more liberal givers.

Or take much of the indifference that is found to-day in respect to doctrinal purity. The reason for such indifference is that there is a woeful ignorance among Christians of what the Scriptures really teach. It is therefore not at all surprising that many Christians are not very sensitive in regard to doctrinal differences; they themselves do not know well the truth. Let us not forget that the Lord makes it the business of every Christian to judge the doctrine which he hears, even that of his pastor, whether it be true or false. The Bereans searched the Scriptures daily in order to know whether those things were so which Paul and Silas preached unto them, Acts 17, 10, 11. The admonition to beware of false prophets which come in sheep's clothing, Matt. 7, 15, and to try the spirits whether they are of God, 1 John 4, 1, is given to all Christians.

### III.

How shall doctrine be preached? Doctrinal preaching is by some considered to be dull and dry preaching; and indeed it is and will not serve its purpose if it is not done right.

Doctrinal sermons require a text that contains sufficient doctrinal material; not a text of a few words only that merely suggest a topic, such as faith or prayer, and merely serves as a sermon motto. No single text says all that the Scripture teaches on any single doctrine, but rather presents only a certain phase of that doctrine. No single text, for instance, speaks of all the attributes of God or of all that the Bible teaches on prayer, on faith, on good works, etc. The

preacher, therefore, must find and treat the specific thought which the text presents. By thus restricting his theme he will, however, increase his sermon material. But this requires painstaking labor: a thorough study of the text on the basis of the original, with due consideration of the context and the relation of that specific phase of a doctrine to the entire doctrine and to the entire *corpus doctrinae* of the Scriptures.

After the preacher has thoroughly studied and thoroughly understands his doctrinal text, he must do two things: he must present the doctrine of the text in a popular way, and he must apply it to the needs of his hearers.

In a previous paragraph we made the statement that doctrinal preaching presents a popular course in dogmatics. In this statement the word "popular" must be emphasized. The preacher must beware of preaching doctrine as though he were an instructor lecturing to a group of theological students in the classroom. The preacher must not preach over the heads of his people and therefore must avoid technical terms and a too concentrated form of presentation. Nor should the preacher attempt to make any doctrine clear to human reason, which attempt would be futile anyway, but he should merely make sure that his hearers understand or know *what* the Bible teaches on a certain point.

After a doctrine has been clearly taught, it must be applied. The hearer, for instance, should be shown why he should believe the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ: first, because the Bible clearly teaches it. If men may reject this doctrine, why should they not be permitted—that is logical reasoning—to reject any other doctrine that is clearly revealed? Secondly, the doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ is necessary for the sinlessness of Christ's human nature and therefore is a very important factor in God's plan of salvation. Ps. 49, 7. 8; Heb. 7, 26. 27.

Or take the doctrine of predestination. This doctrine, clearly taught in the Scripture, leaving no room for Calvinism or synergism, gives to the Christian the assurance that nothing can rob him of his salvation, but that God will keep him in His grace or restore him if he has fallen. How this doctrine should be taught so that one will neither despair of his salvation nor securely live in sin, but rather understand the purpose and receive the comfort of this doctrine, we learn from Article XI of the Formula of Concord, *Triglot*, pp. 1066—1069.

Doctrinal sermons are the most difficult to preach. Their preparation requires much time and attention on the part of the preacher, much study and hard work. It is to be feared that this is one reason, if not the chief reason, why doctrinal preaching is much neglected.

The real demands made upon the pastor in this strenuous age are greater than they have been, and besides there are many more distractions. When a preacher is pressed for time or is not in the mood of doing real hard work, the sermon offering pious platitudes or general warnings, exhortations, and admonitions, with a few stories, some statistics, and perhaps some references to current news is the easier to prepare and to preach. But such poor diet does not at times even offer the milk of the Word, much less "the strong meat that belongeth to them that are of full age," Heb. 5, 12—14. He is indeed a poor teacher anywhere who does not advance in knowledge those whom he is called to teach. But what shall we say of a preacher who makes his hearers sit through sermons for a whole year, and even a number of years, without advancing them in spiritual knowledge and in spiritual life because he fails to declare unto them all the counsel of God and has kept back from them much that would have been profitable, not faithfully ministering to those blood-bought souls which God has entrusted to him and for which he must give an account? Acts 20, 20. 27. 28; Heb. 13, 17. J. H. C. Farrz.

