

## LECTURE III.

### DISTRIBUTION OF SUBJECTS.

RHETORIC or the science of the orator has been tritely called *the art of persuasion*. Its usual distribution has been into the three parts of *Invention*, *Disposition*, and *Elocution*.<sup>1</sup> The last word, you must know, is taken here in a sense much wider than our popular usage gives to it, including the whole subjects of diction and style. The first two parts, then, treat of the matter of the discourse. The last discusses everything pertaining to the verbal *medium*, by which this matter is conveyed to the bearer's mind. Invention discovers and selects this matter. Disposition arranges it in its proper place. Upon this classification there are two obvious remarks. One is, that to the sacred orator, the work of invention cannot be what it is to the secu-

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero de Orat. Lib. II. c. 19, § 79: Denique quinque faciunt quasi membra eloquentiæ, invenire quid dicas, inventa disponere, deinde ornare verbis, post memoriæ mandare, tum ad extremum agere ac pronuntiare. See also Lib. I. c. 31, § 142.

Quintilian, L. III. c. 3, § 1: Omnis autem orandi ratio, ut plurimi maxime auctores tradiderunt, quinque partibus constat, inventione, dispositione, elocutione, memoria, pronuntiatione sive actione.

The moderns, against the protest of Quintilian, reduce the division to the first three, including the pronuntiation, under elocution, and treat the memorizing as rather an instrument than a constituent part of rhetoric.

lar, because, as has been shown above, the whole matter which we are to handle is given to us by the Scriptures. If we restrict invention to selection, still the principles of systematic and pastoral theology rather than rhetoric, will be, in this, the student's guide. The other remark is that made by *Vinet*, that invention is a work not confined to the matter. The method, the style, the diction, the gesticulation, all must be invented. His meaning is not that they may be artificial; but that they must, in order to be appropriate, be discovered and selected by the same exertions of the mind which give the speaker his thoughts. You will not find me, then, attempting to impose this distribution, throughout, upon the body of this course. Several of the subjects, which we shall next consider together, may be regarded as falling partially under the head of invention. The other two divisions, disposition and elocution, we can more accurately apply.

It is now necessary to undertake a question of classification of a different sort. It is this: Are there more species of sermons than one? And if so, what are they? One answer divides them, according to the extent of the passage of Scripture upon which they are founded, into topical and expository; another, according to their matter, into doctrinal, practical, and narrative. Let us consider the latter classification first.

By a doctrinal sermon is not intended one of those peculiar discussions so named in the popular phrase of the last generation, where the points which distinguish Calvinism from the lower systems of theology, and especially the points of predestination, were discussed. But we intend the treatment of all the doctrines which

make up the system of revealed theology, not exclusive of those just named. Doctrinal preaching is that which aims to instruct the people methodically in the truths of the Gospel. It should also be distinguished from "theological preaching." In the latter, the strict methods of science rather than the claims of rhetoric prevail. Analysis and abstraction are freely employed, in disregard of the difficulty and even of the repulsiveness of the discussion. The object is neither the pleasure of taste nor the immediate movement of the will, but the exact ascertainment of truth by the understanding. Theological teaching, therefore, properly requires of its pupils laborious attention, and demands the effort to grasp what may be abstruse. It seeks to be logical and exhaustive of its subject. Manifestly this method can rarely be appropriate to the pulpit, because the multitude to be instructed there do not think abstractly, but delight in the concrete; because they are unaccustomed to scientific rigour; because truth dressed in this form will be unintelligible and repulsive to them. President Dwight is said to have delivered his work in sermons (expositions of the plainer doctrines and reasonings of theology) to his students. Dr. Ashbell Green prepared his lectures on the Shorter Catechism for the advanced catechumens of his charge, educated young persons. Unless you have a peculiar and select audience like these, you will not often attempt theological sermons. Your doctrinal teachings should be science made popular. They will set forth some theses of your theology; they will, of course, not be deficient in sound logic; they will address themselves with masculine strength to the understandings of your hear-

ers: systematic diviuity will inform and enrich them from its stores. But its form will be popular, and in the concrete, rather than abstractly scientific. And you will consult that plainness of argument and paucity of separate points suitable to those who only listen to the fleeting words, instead of poring over the permanent page. It may be supposed, at the first glance, that if it is of the essence of the oration to aim at a practical movement of the will, this instructiveness of the doctrinal sermon is inconsistent with the rhetorical treatment. The reply is, first, that we have not asserted the pastor must always be expressly the orator, or that every discourse must needs be a true oration. His teaching may sometimes properly be homiletic rather than rhetorical. But second, the good doctrinal sermon will usually have a rhetorical character, because it will be applied in the close to a practical result. It is the duty of the preacher so to establish the dogmas of the faith in the understandings of the people, that they shall not remain abstract dogmas, but shall reveal their close bearing upon the life. It was a golden maxim of the Protestant fathers, that "doctrines must be preached practically and duties doctrinally."

The reasons for doctrinal preaching thus defined, may be all traced to the principle that truth is in order to godliness. Sanctification is by the truth. Man is a reasoning creature, and the word and Spirit of God deal with him in conformity with this rational nature. All those emotions and volitions, which have right moral character, are prompted in man by intelligent motives. To say that one has no reason for his volitions, is to describe them as either criminal or merely animal. In

the things of God man only feels as he sees, and because he sees with his mind. A moment's consideration of these obvious facts will convince you that there cannot be, in the nature of the case, any other instrumentality to be used by creatures for inculcating religion and procuring right feeling and action, than that which begins by informing the understanding. The truth, as seen in the light of evidence, is the only possible object of rational emotions. From this point of view, we easily understand how unreasonable are the notions and demands of those good people who decry didactic preaching. "Such discourses," they say, "are dry and repulsive. They give us merely theology in its bare bones. They inflate the head with conceit without warming the heart. The aim of Christianity is but to make men feel and act aright. Let the preacher then aim directly at the heart, producing right feeling, and all will be accomplished." Now, I might assent to the latter statements, and yet raise the question, How shall the heart be reached, except through the head? How can a rational creature be made to feel intelligently, unless we cause his reason to apprehend that which may be the object of rational feeling? If any affection is produced otherwise, it must be merely animal or else evil. Heat without light is blind, as light without heat is cold. The Sun of Righteousness, like the natural luminary, becomes the fountain of life in his appropriate realm by giving heat through light. To the objection that didactic preaching is dry, I answer, that if it ever seems to be so, this is the fault of the preacher and not of the truth. If his attempted development of doctrine be confused, illogical, iterative, tedious; if the

didactic unfolding of truth be perversely severed from the practical results, he may not be surprised to find that he (not his subject) is dull. But so far is didactic instruction from being dry, I assert nothing else is interesting to a reasonable nature. My meaning is, that the skilful inculcation of truth enlists the attention without fail, for this is insured by the mind's instinctive appetite for knowledge. And, moreover, no rational emotion can excite the heart, except as its power is grounded in some express or implied truth seen by the mind. The truth which generates the feeling may be very plain or obvious; it may be implied, and not expressly obtruded. Yet, had there been no successful didactic agency, there would have been no influence upon the feelings. It may also be retorted that if many unskilful didactic attempts are dull, nothing is ever witnessed more drearily wearisome than many a hortatory appeal grounded in no intelligent display of truth, which professes to carry out the theory I have exposed.

Referring to the other part of that theory which professes to find the sole practical end of preaching in right action, I find another forcible argument for doctrinal preaching. Is it said, "Now are we Christ's friends, if we do whatsoever he commandeth"? I reply by the question, How can a rational creature so do, as to please a spiritual God, without comprehending a reason for his obedience? Man is a moral creature only as he is a rational one. The moral motive must be intelligent, or it is naught. Unless a ground of obligation is apprehended by the reason, conscience is untouched, and the action which man takes is either that of moral

indifferency, or of animal instinct, or it is criminal. Hence it follows that doctrinal instruction is as rudimental to all right action as to right feeling.

The result of all this is, that no people can be formed into stable, consistent and righteous Christians without much doctrinal instruction. My argument is reinforced by the example of Christ and his apostles. These inspired preachers are eminently doctrinal; in other words, they are full of explanations of, and evidences for, the great truths and facts which make up the Christian system. They give us an illustrious example of the method of dealing with the human soul, by always grounding their appeals to the heart upon appeals to the mind. The preacher may amuse the curiosity of his hearers with human speculations; he may excite by the scintillations of his rhetoric, but if he has not instructed them in divine truth, he has done nothing. A permanent religious effect is impossible.

In concluding this subject, let me add a word touching the extent of this doctrinal instruction. Shall it embrace all the doctrines of the Scriptures, popular and unpopular? And what discretion shall the pastor allow himself in avoiding collisions with the prejudices of his hearers? He must not keep back any revealed truth. The Scriptures leave no room for question here. The preacher must be able to take his charge to witness with the apostle<sup>1</sup> that "he is pure from the blood of all men, for he has not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God." "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine."<sup>2</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> Acts xx. 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 16.

this conclusion follows directly from the nature of the preacher's commission. But, on the other hand, the pastor should be "a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, who is like unto a man that is a householder which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old."<sup>1</sup> The apostle, although the most faithful of men, "fed some with milk, and not with strong meat, for hitherto they were not able to bear it."<sup>2</sup> Candour will never permit the true minister to disclaim any doctrine taught by the Bible, when he is directly required either to avow it or to deny. Candour will ensure his inculcation of the whole circle of revealed truths in scriptural relations and proportions. Yet he will study so to connect the disputed with the admitted, and to proceed from the known to the unknown, as to obviate all unnecessary prejudice and secure the happiest ingress for the truth. For doing this, he can find no rule so safe as to follow the Scripture models in the space and prominence allotted to different truths, and the connections in which they are introduced. You will not expect here a more particular enumeration of the heads of divinity which require frequent and ample display. This you will be taught rather by your systematic and pastoral theology; the former shows you which are the cardinal doctrines of our faith, and the latter informs you of the peculiar need for their repetition arising from man's native perversity of mind.

The second class of sermons is the practical, or ethical. By this term are intended those discourses which discuss the duties of the Christian life toward God and

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. xiii. 52.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 2.

toward man ; with their nature, limits, obligations, and motives. These topics should abound in the preaching of every pastor. You will not understand me as recommending, here, the inculcation of a religion of self-righteous works. I would have you preach the duties of the law, not that men may learn to expect their salvation from them, but that they may know they cannot be saved by them. It is because "the law is our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ;"<sup>1</sup> because "I had not known sin but by the law."<sup>2</sup> "For without the law, sin is dead." Men are "alive without the law; but when the commandment comes, sin revives, and they die." The whole policy of the pastor's instructions is contained, in germ, in that saying of Christ: "They that be whole need not a physician; but they that be sick." That men may heartily embrace the gospel, the essential point is to make them know and feel their radical disease. This you will not teach them effectually by mere general announcements of depravity and the fall. When the claims of the law are brought to their souls, when they are made to see perspicuously what is their extent, and that they are reasonable, when they become conscious of their own innate and fundamental enmity to those just demands, and bondage to evil desires; and when they bear the wrath denounced by God against every transgression; then there is hope that they will find themselves truly lost, and will cry to the Deliverer for rescue.

But, second: the practical definition of Christianity has been fully accepted by us. Its end and aim is holy

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<sup>1</sup> Gal. iii. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. vii. 7.

living.<sup>1</sup> Of this holy life, the law of God is the rule. The believer justified in Christ does not, indeed, look to the law for his redeeming merit; but he receives it as his guide to the obedience of faith and love, as fully as though he were still under a covenant of works. He therefore needs practical instruction, as really as the unbeliever. It must stimulate and direct him in the Christian race, and make him a "peculiar person, zealous of good works." The exclusive preaching of doctrine to professed Christians tends to cultivate an Antinomian Spirit. The exclusive inculcation of duties fosters self-righteousness. The edification of the Church, then, demands the diligent intermixture of both kinds. This precept may be confirmed by the remark, that, as the motives and obligations of all duties are rooted in the doctrines, so the best illustrations of the doctrines are by their application to the duties. The two are inseparably connected as grounds and conclusions, as means and end; and their systematic separation in your instructions would leave your hearers incapable of a correct understanding of either.

But the crowning argument is again the precedent set us by Christ and his apostles. While they were, as has been remarked, doctrinal, they were eminently practical preachers. Nothing can be more instructive than the manner in which the Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Colossians, and the Hebrews proceed. In their introductory chapters, they lay a solid foundation of argument and testimony for some cardinal doctrines of redemption; and from these, they

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<sup>1</sup> Eph. i. 4; Titus ii. 14, *et passim*.

glide into the enforcement of duties by a beautiful transition. The pastor has here models given by inspiration, and obviously conformed to the nature of man as a reasonable and moral creature.

Some important observations remain, touching the mode in which the law should be preached. "We know that the law is spiritual, but we are carnal, sold under sin."<sup>1</sup> The apostle tells us that he had not been made aware of his own concupiscence, except the law had said, "Thou shalt not covet." It is imperative, therefore, that you so unfold the law of God, as to exhibit its searching requirements of right thoughts and feelings, as well as right actions of the bodily members. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." "From within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders." The disease of sin is never so probed as to lead the sufferer in earnest to the Great Physician, until the seat of the evil is revealed in the heart itself. And it is chiefly by disclosing the spirituality of the law, that we affect the convicted soul with a suitable apprehension of the breadth of the law, of his own enmity and inability, and of the infinite holiness of its Author, at once.

Next, let the claims of the law be always enforced, not as moral observances only, but as evangelical duties. If you suppose that, by calling this class of sermons the ethical, I designed to recommend your founding your appeals to men's consciences on the fitness of things, on the natural claims and advantages of virtue, I have been much misunderstood. It is only the morality of

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. vii. 7, 14.

the cross which the Christian pastor should teach. It will not be amiss, indeed, for him to show, transiently, how completely the best teachings of natural morality are at one with those of the gospel. But his chief motives should always be drawn from the latter. Let him inculcate virtue, not like a Seneca, but like a Paul. He should trace every precept of the law to its connection with the redeeming love of Christ, and draw thence his incitements to obey. Would he urge, for instance, Christian fidelity on parents? He will not content himself with appealing to the law of nature expressed in the instinctive parental love, with arguing from the feebleness, dependence or loveliness of our offspring, or with promising the comforts which dutiful children confer upon our old age. These will be the least of his grounds, and most briefly despatched. He will proceed to crown his argument, by directing the hearts of parents chiefly to that Redeemer who claims our children as of his kingdom, to the divine blood with which he has purchased their immortal souls, and to the future of glory and bliss which he offers, chiefly through the means of parental fidelity, to confer on them. Thus, every labour of the father for his child is connected with the Christian's constraining principle—the love of Christ.

It is a precept of prime weight, that your enforcements of evangelical duty and charges of shortcoming be definite, and even specific. There is, I apprehend, in the pulpits of our Church, no lack of general declarations concerning man's depravity, transgression and guilt. Nor do we find, among the ungodly, any backwardness in making the general confession that they

are sinners. But this vague sense of sin and guilt is manifestly without effect. They confess, and still transgress. They avow, in words, their need of cleansing and justification, and yet refuse the salvation offered, with all the supineness of conscious security. It is to be feared that a quickening of these dead hearts will never be effected by launching at them the common-places of theology. The mere statement of their responsibility and guilt, in general, will be inadequate. But if their own duties and delinquencies were brought home to them in their details, they would, with the blessing of the Holy Ghost, be made to feel wherein they were sinners indeed, and why under the curse. My meaning may be explained by the instance I employed above. Tell your unrenewed hearer that he is a parent, that he owes duty to his child, and he will readily admit it. Charge shortcoming on him in this duty: he will admit this also, and after the admission he will be as callous as before. But now let us suppose the parental duties defined, and enforced from their high, evangelical obligations, and the cruelty of that parental neglect, which usually destroys the soul of the child, justly painted in the lights of the eternal world. May we not hope that the delinquent parent will acquire some definite conviction of his sin, and especially that his eyes will begin to open to the enormity and malignity of that state of heart charged upon him by the Scriptures, and hitherto so firmly disbelieved by him? In this view of practical preaching, we have a powerful argument for its employment to lead sinners to the Saviour. It is only when we become specific, and apply the general principles of evangelical duty,

with close discrimination, to the circumstances of our hearers, that we make the law their "schoolmaster to lead them unto Christ." While we are instructing God's people in the details of their duty, we may be teaching his enemies the number of their sins.