

CHAPTER V.

METHODS OF DIVISION (*Cont.*).

III. THE PROPOSITIONAL METHOD.

I. **Its meaning.** By this is meant that mode of Division which takes the form of propositions or observations. The beginning of the sermon is occupied in an explanation of the text, from which certain propositions, observations or inferences are drawn which are made the heads of the discourse.

The difference between these terms may be thus defined:

A Proposition is a statement made for consideration, proof, and acceptance. It is a complete sentence, consisting of a subject and predicate united by a copula, *e.g.*, "the Bible is true."

An Observation is the expression of an opinion or judgment, *e.g.*, "sin is destructive of happiness."

An Inference is a statement drawn from another which is admitted; *e.g.*, because Christ stilled the tempest, the inference is drawn, "He can calm any trouble."

These propositions may be entirely distinct from each other; but it is a gain if they can be stated in the form of a syllogism, *viz.*, two premises and a conclusion; *e.g.*, on Ex. xxxiii: 18-19. I. Moses desired to see God's glory.

II. God proposed to reveal to him His goodness. III. This goodness was of more value to Moses than a sight of God's glory.

2. **Its Recommendations.** Several considerations join to recommend this method:

(a.) It possesses all the advantages of the topical method as specified under that head, as it deals with the topic as directly as with the text.

(b.) It has the additional recommendation of being more complete and elegant in style. Instead of specifying its divisions by a word or two, each head is a full sentence, which is both more satisfactory and more pleasing to the hearer, as it gives both strength and elegance to the discourse.

3. **Its treatment.** There are two ways of using this method :

(a.) Where the text does not require much explanation, such explanation should form the Introduction of the sermon, and then the observations or propositions will follow as the chief heads in regular order.

Examples: Acts xxii: 16. " And now, why, tarriest thou? "

1. There are some things for which no man can be tarrying.

(E.g.-Inducement, opportunity, warning, invitation, etc.)

II. There are some things for which some may be tarrying.

(E.g.-For righteousness-for company-more feeling, etc.)

III. There is nothing for which any need be tarrying.

DIVISION.

(Because Christ has removed every obstacle, and made every provision.)

Luke ii : 49. "Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business?"

- I. God has business on earth.
- II. His children must attend to it.
- III. It is time to be about it.

Matt. v: 23-4. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar," etc.

- I. God's people must come to God's altar.
- II. None must come there empty-handed.
- III. Our gifts must be offered in the right spirit.

I. Sam. ii: 25. "If a man sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him?"

1. Against the Lord there are sins.
- II. Against sin there is judgment.
- III. Against judgment there is entreaty.

(b.) If an extended explanation is necessary, it will be better to make it a separate part of the sermon, and to divide thus: I. The text *explained*. II. The text *applied*. Then under the latter head bring in the various propositions or inferences as sub-divisions.

Example: Matt. xx: 8. "Call the laborers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first."

- I. The text explained.
 1. The purpose of this parable.
 2. The meaning of its terms.
- II. The text applied.
 1. God's rewards are for laborers.
 2. All service done for him has a reward.

3. This reward comes at evening.
4. In it no distinctions are made.

We add other examples of this third method of division. The following is by Dr. Krauth:

Isa. xxi: 11-12. "The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night," [After explaining the prophecy and applying it to our times, he based the discussion on the following propositions :]

- I. There are nights and mornings to both God's friends and foes.
- II. To God's friends a morning cometh which will have no night.
- III. To God's foes a night cometh which will have no morning.

We give two examples of this method by Dr. Seiss:

Gal. vi: 14. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," etc.

- I. What Paul might have gloried in, but did not.
- II. What he was not likely to glory_in, but did.
- III. What persuaded him to glory in what he did.

The other is on Acts iv: 23. "And being let go, they went to their own company,"

- I. We are all more or less under restraint.
- II. These restraints are often relaxed.
- III. Times of relaxed restraint reveal the true character.

DIVISION.

Robert Hall, one of England's eminent preachers in his day, frequently employed this method.

On Deut, xxxiii: 25, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be," his divisions are: I. God's people must often endure heavy trials and tread rough paths. II. The prospect of these is apt to dismay them. III. But in them they are assured of all-sufficient strength.

Spurgeon has a sermon on John xix: 5. "Behold the Man!"

I. The text explained.

II. The text applied.

1. Let us contemplate Christ suffering to instruct our minds.
2. To excite our emotions.
3. To improve our lives.

William Jay, of England, whose sermons generally are models of homiletical arrangement, has the following:

Acts xviii: 27. "Who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace."

I. Christians are believers.

II. They believe through grace.

III. They need help.

IV. This is afforded by the ministry of the Gospel.

Another illustration of this method we take from an unknown source: John i: 5. "The light shineth in darkness."

I. The light of truth shineth in the darkness of error.

II. The light of righteousness - in the darkness of sin.

III. The light of life-in the darkness of death.

IV. THE INTERROGATIVE METHOD.

1. Its meaning. By this is meant that method of Disposition or Division which is expressed in questions. It relates almost entirely to the form, and may be used in either textual or topical sermons. This method was frequently used by the church-fathers who applied the following questions to their texts or topics, and made them the heads of discourse: Quis,-Quid,-Quibus, - Quo,-Quomodo,-Quando,-Ubi,-Cur, etc. Of this kind are the divisions of Bernard in his sermon on I. Thess. iv : 16. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." I. Quis veniat? II. Unde? III. Quo? IV. Quando? V. Quomodo? VI. Adquid?

Similar queries can be applied to many texts, and will form the heads of the sermon.

2. Examples. Matt. xxi: 28. "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard."

I. Who? God's children = "son." II. What? "Go work." III. When? "To-day," IV. Where? "In my vineyard."

Heb. xi : 2. "For by it the elders obtained a good report."

I. Who? "The elders." II. What did they obtain? "A good report." III. How? "By it," *i.e.*, by their faith.

Eph. iv : 30. "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

I. Whom? The Holy Spirit. II. What? Grieve not. III. Why? By Him we are sealed.

Matt. xi : 28. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,"

I. Who shall come? The heavy laden. II. To whom? To Jesus. III. Why? To gain rest.

3. Its advantages.

(a.) It is the simplest and easiest method the preacher can employ in dividing his sermon, and is readily understood by his hearers.

(b.) Interrogatories naturally awaken interest, because demanding a reply, and thus a great point is gained in securing attention to the discussion.

A sermon on faith may thus be divided: I. Its Nature; II. Its Means; III. Its Importance. But if these were stated interrogatively thus: I. What is faith? II. How can we get it? III. Why should we have it?—a greater interest is at once awakened in the subject.

(c.) It gives clearness, especially in argumentative or philosophical sermons, both in the presentation of the subject, and in its subsequent discussion.

(d.) It may be made a very practical, pointed and direct method of applying truth to the conscience, throughout the entire sermon.

For example a sermon on Rom. xiv.rs : "So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God," would be of this sort if divided thus:

- I. Who art thou? God's friend or foe.
- II. Whither goest thou? On to judgment.
- III. What preparation hast thou made?

(c.) It was the ancient Socratic manner of instruction; it is the church's method of catechization, and the natural form of investigation, discussion and expostulation.

¶ In the use of this method great caution is necessary not to raise questions the preacher cannot answer-and to avoid all questions which are inappropriate or merely curious.

4. Its use. This method may be employed in three ways:

"(a.) In expressing the main divisions of the sermon. In this case the answers to these questions will form or suggest the sub-divisions.

Examples: John xi: 28. "The Master is come and calleth for thee."

I. Who is come? II. Whom does He call? III. What does He want?

I. Pet. iv: 17. "What shall the end be of them who obey not the Gospel of God?"

I. What is the Gospel of God? II. Why do some disobey it? III. What will be their end?

Acts ii: 47. "The Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved."

I. Who added to the church? II. Whom did He add? III. To what did He add them? IV. When was this done?

Ps, xix: 12. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

I. What are secret faults?

- II. How can we be cleansed from them ?
- III. Why should we be concerned about them?

Ps, li: 10. "Renew a right spirit within me."

- I. What is a right spirit?
- II. How can it be renewed?
- III. Why should we seek it ?

Luke xxiii: 42. "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom."

- I. Whose prayer was this?
- II. When was it made?
- III. What did it ask?

(*b.*) When the main divisions are in the shape of statements, the sub-divisions may take the interrogative form. This is often its better use, as it thus reaches the substance of the sermon and aids in its discussion.

Examples: Ps.lxxiii: 24. "Thou shall guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

I. Our present guidance. 1. *Who?* "Thou." 2. *How?* "With thy counsel." 3. *Whom?* "Me."-a personal matter.

II. Our future reception. 1. *Where?* "To glory." 2. *When?* "Afterward." 3. *How?* "Receive,"-a friendly welcome.

II. Sam. 18:29. "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

I. The perils of young men. 1. What are they? 2. How do they imperil ?

II. Their safeguards. 1. What are they?

2. How can they be gained? 3. Why should they be secured?

Luke xxii: 61-62. "And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter," etc.

I. Peter's sin.

1. What was it? 2. How do we account for it? 3. Who now imitate it ?

II. Peter's sorrow.

1. What produced it? 2. How was it manifested? 3. What does it teach us ?

(c.) The Interrogative form may relate only to the **theme**, -yet so affect the entire sermon as to classify it under this method. This is especially the case when the answers to the interrogative theme furnish the main divisions of the sermon.

Examples: Luke xix: 41. "When he was come near he beheld the city and wept over it."

If the theme be expressed as a question, - Why did Jesus weep over Jerusalem? the answers would form the following main divisions: I. Because of its sin; II. Because of its unbelief; III. Because of its doom.

Acts ix : 26. "When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples."

If the theme be worded, - Why should believers join the church? the answers would be, I. Because Christ requires it. II. They need the church. III. The church needs them.

The main divisions being answers to a question, places the treatment under the Interrogative method.

DIVISION.

V. THE EXPOSITORY METHOD.

1. **Its meaning.** The Expository method consists in the explanation, discussion, and application of whole chapters, or more or less extended parts of Scripture, instead of selecting a single verse or short passage as the text of the sermon.

2. **Its advantages.** The chief arguments in favor of this method of preaching are:

(a.) It is the **primal idea** and purpose of preaching.

(b.) It is of **ancient usage**. Many sermons which have come down to us from the earlier ages are of this sort. The custom of founding a sermon on a short and detached sentence or statement of Scripture was unusual and possibly unheard of until after the fifth century. The original purpose of preaching was to explain the plan of salvation or some entire section of the Bible.

(c.) It secures a **better acquaintance** with the contents of the Bible, to both preacher and hearers. It makes the preacher "mighty in the Scripture," and this Sword of the Spirit becomes his familiar and effective weapon. It requires careful study, for he cannot omit or escape the difficult passages which come in course, but must meet and explain them.

(d.) It affords opportunity to **speak on subjects** which otherwise would or might be omitted or neglected. It brings out the whole counsel of God, and justifies topics, like sins of lewdness, etc.,-which could not be made special subjects of sermons without offence.

EXPOSITORY METHOD.

3. **Its methods.** It may be used in two ways :

(a.) In **pure exposition.** Thus an entire chapter is taken, explained and applied, verse by verse; or an entire Epistle or other Book, in a series of discourses.

Expository sermons are necessarily largely exegetical and take the form of a practical commentary. Luther on Galatians and other parts of Scripture is an excellent example and model of Expository discourse. Dr. Seiss on Leviticus, and Robertson on Corinthians may also be profitably studied as examples in which the leading thoughts of the various chapters or sections, instead of every verse, are presented and applied.

(b.) In **historical or biographical** discourses.

Instead of a continuous exposition of some book of the Bible, this plan selects some prominent event or person as the topic of discourse, and reproduces the Bible narrative in the preacher's own language, with suitable comment and application as the story unfolds. Such topics are found, *e.g.*, in the history of the antediluvian world; in the journey of Israel from Egypt to Canaan; or in the planting of the Christian church as given in the Acts. Intensely interesting and instructive discourses of an expository sort can be produced when they take the **biographical** form; such as a series on the life of Abraham or of Jacob; the story of Joseph or of Esther; the life of Moses, David, or Elijah, or of St. Paul, St. Peter, and other New Testament characters.

This biographical plan avoids the objection against expository preaching that it becomes monotonous and disjointed when chapters are discussed verse by verse. It has furthermore the great advantage of being based on a story, the very telling of which secures attention and interest from the beginning, and, if wisely arranged and developed, will hold them to the close.

A very large part of the Bible is biography, and this biographical form of sermons or lectures is the best way to bring out the meaning and lessons of such parts, and to make them bear on the minds and hearts of the congregation, and in a way not soon forgotten. Many leading preachers employ this method, especially at the second or evening service, and their published lectures which abound in our homiletical literature will be found of service and material aid by young preachers who are timid in venturing in unfamiliar waters. Among the best general helps in this line, we mention Farrar, and also Conybeare and Howson, on St. Paul; Bishop Hall's contemplations on the Old and New Testaments; Dean Stanley's History of the Jewish Church; and Henry's Exposition of the Bible, which, whilst of little value critically or exegetically, is most helpful in homiletical arrangement and practical suggestion.

4. **Its Requisites.** For successful preaching under this method, several things are necessary :

(a.) The preacher must possess and cultivate **descriptive power**, -i.e. the gift or tact of

giving the narrative in a lucid, connected and interesting way.

(b.) He must make himself familiar with the country, people, customs, times and other circumstances of the subject before him. Standard Cyclopedias, good Bible Dictionaries and books of travel in Bible lands should be carefully consulted.

(c.) The discourse should not be a rambling talk, but be fitly framed together. It may be divided into two parts: I. The Narrative; and II. The lessons it suggests. But a better way is to draw the lessons and make the application as the points arise in the narrative, and thus keep up the narrative feature to the close.

In either way the discourse should have a distinct purpose, and present some one phase as the most prominent. This secures unity of discourse, aids the preacher in recalling the various points, and adds interest to both description and discussion. For example, let us take the life of Jacob and come to Gen. xxviii. Our topic would be "Jacob's Journey," and the chapter would be covered by the following main divisions:

I. His father's suggestion. II. His brother's anger. III. His own experience.

Or, I. Isaac. His counsel, and blessing, *vs.* 1-5. II. Esau. His marriage and motive, *vs.* 6-9. III. Jacob. His journey, vision and vow, *vs.* 11-22.

A series on the first chapters in Genesis could be arranged under the following heads:

Chap. I. The Creation. I. It's Author;

God. II. Its manner; by His word. III. Its process: 1. Light. 2. Order. 3. Life. (a.) Vegetation. (b.) Fish and fowls. (c.) Animals. (d.) Man.

Chap. II. The Creation of Man. I. His special creation, *u.* 7. II. His residence, *us*, 8-14. III. His occupation, *v.* IS. IV. His companions. 1. Animals, *vs.* 19, 20. 2. Eve. (a.) Her creation, *vs.* 21-2. (b.) Their marriage. V. His religion. 1. The Sabbath appointed, *vs.* 2, 3. 2. Obedience required, *v.* 17.

Chap. III. The Fall. I. The temptation, *vs.* 1-5. II. The sin, *v.* 6. III. The consequence. 1. The investigation, *vs.* 8-13. 2. The sentence, *vs.* 16-9. 3. The expulsion, *us*, 22-4.

If preaching on the life of St. Paul we come to Acts xvi., we could make the topic "St. Paul on the confines of two Continents," and consider:

I. What happened on leaving Asia? 1. The call of Timothy, *vs.* 1-3. 2. Delivering the Synodical decrees, *vs.* 4, 5. 3. The Macedonian vision, *us*, 8-10.

II. What occurred on entering Europe? I. The first convert, *vs.* 12-15. 2. The imprisonment and deliverance, *us*, 16-28. 3. The conversion of the jailer, *vs.* 29-34.

Or we could style it "The three conversions : " I. That of Timothy, *us.* 1-3. II. That of Lydia, *vs.* 12-15. III. That of the jailer, *tis.* 23-34.

5. Its occasions. The Expository method may be used:

(a.) In preaching on the Pericopes or any extended passage, as the text of the sermon. ❧

(b.) It especially commends itself for the second or evening service. It is a relief and advantage to the preacher to have something different from the morning discourse, and will often secure full attendance and special interest on the part of the congregation.

(c.) It is the best method for week-evening services, where the pastor should be a teacher rather than a preacher. Whether he takes the Sunday-school lesson or some other selection, this method of Expository lecture will be found the best for such services.

GENERAL REMARKS ON METHODS OF DIVISION.

1. While every preacher will naturally give preference to one of these methods, it is well to cultivate and use them all at different times. Each method has its peculiar advantages, and variety in the treatment of texts and topics will also be gained.

2. Sometimes a text will admit of the combination of two or more of these methods in the same discourse. Some homileticians have made this a separate method of division and called it the **topico-textual** method, because it presents topical points of thought under a textual arrangement.

Thus a sermon on Faith, if based on John xi :40, would present these points:

- I. Its Nature. "If thou wouldst believe."
- II. Its Basis. "Said I not unto thee" (the word and promises of Christ).
- III. Its Reward. "Thou shouldst see the

DIVISION.

glory of God." Here we have the arrangement and advantages of the topical and textual methods combined.

A sermon on Sin, if based on James I: 15, would allow the same combination :.

I. Its Source. "When lust hath conceived."

II. Its Course. "**It** bringeth forth sin."

III. Its End. "Bringeth forth death."

This combination is also seen in a division suggested under the Propositional method, viz.:

I. The text explained. (Analytical or textual treatment.)

II. The text applied. (In Synthetical propositions or inferences.)

Such combination is of special value because possessing the advantages of both methods. In preaching a topical sermon, therefore, it is not sufficient to have an appropriate text, but the most suitable text that can be found, and if possible a text which contains all the points of the topic which are to be prominent in the sermon.

3. Sometimes it may be well to depart from the stiff and formal phraseology of the usual divisions, and compare the text to a garden of flowers, a basket of fruit, or a house of many mansions, etc., each of which is first examined separately, and then grouped together for contemplation. This would be really the same as already given, but the manner of putting it may add interest to the ser-

mon, provided the law of fitness and propriety be not violated, and it be not employed too often.

Examples: Gal. v: 22, 23. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace," etc.

Here a refreshing departure would be to call this text a basket of precious fruit, and the preacher would

I. Exhibit each kind separately. [Explain each term.]

II. Place them together for contemplation. [Here he would observe they were the fruit of the Spirit, not of the world; they were alike, yet of great variety; of a kind that will not rot or decay, and" against which there is no law."]

III. Distribute them to the congregation.

1. For their own delight.
2. For the relief of others.
3. For occasion of thanksgiving to God.

Rom. xi : 33. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God," etc.

Here is a river of God which, like the river in Eden, parts into four heads.

1. Let us walk along the banks of each stream, and gaze into" the depths" of

1. His knowledge.
2. His wisdom.
3. His judgments.
4. His ways.

II. Step aside and contemplate them together.

We will thus be impressed with these lessons:

1. God's attributes, doctrines, and dealings are beyond our comprehension.

DIVISION.

2. They are full of "riches," though not understood.

3. Their contemplation is of great value:

(a) In assuring our faith.

(b) In silencing our cavils.

(c) In consoling our griefs.

4. While we prepare our sermons according to some recognized method, we should ever remain master and not become the slave of that method. The preacher's personality must not be sacrificed to accommodate the machinery of homiletics, but should be manifest in the use he makes of that machinery. Each one must choose that method which suits him best, and which he can really make his own—that which is best adapted to the working of his mind, as well as to the people he addresses, and the purpose he has in view. And this fact should make him study, not the less but the more, these methods of preparing sermons, until he has mastered them all.

Method in preparation imposes no fetters on the mind, but facilitates free action and develops its resources. If homiletical rules and methods ever become hurtful instead of helpful, such rules are either false or else they are not properly understood and used. At the same time, it should not be forgotten if these rules at times seem to put restraint on the preacher, it is to secure the rights of the hearer.