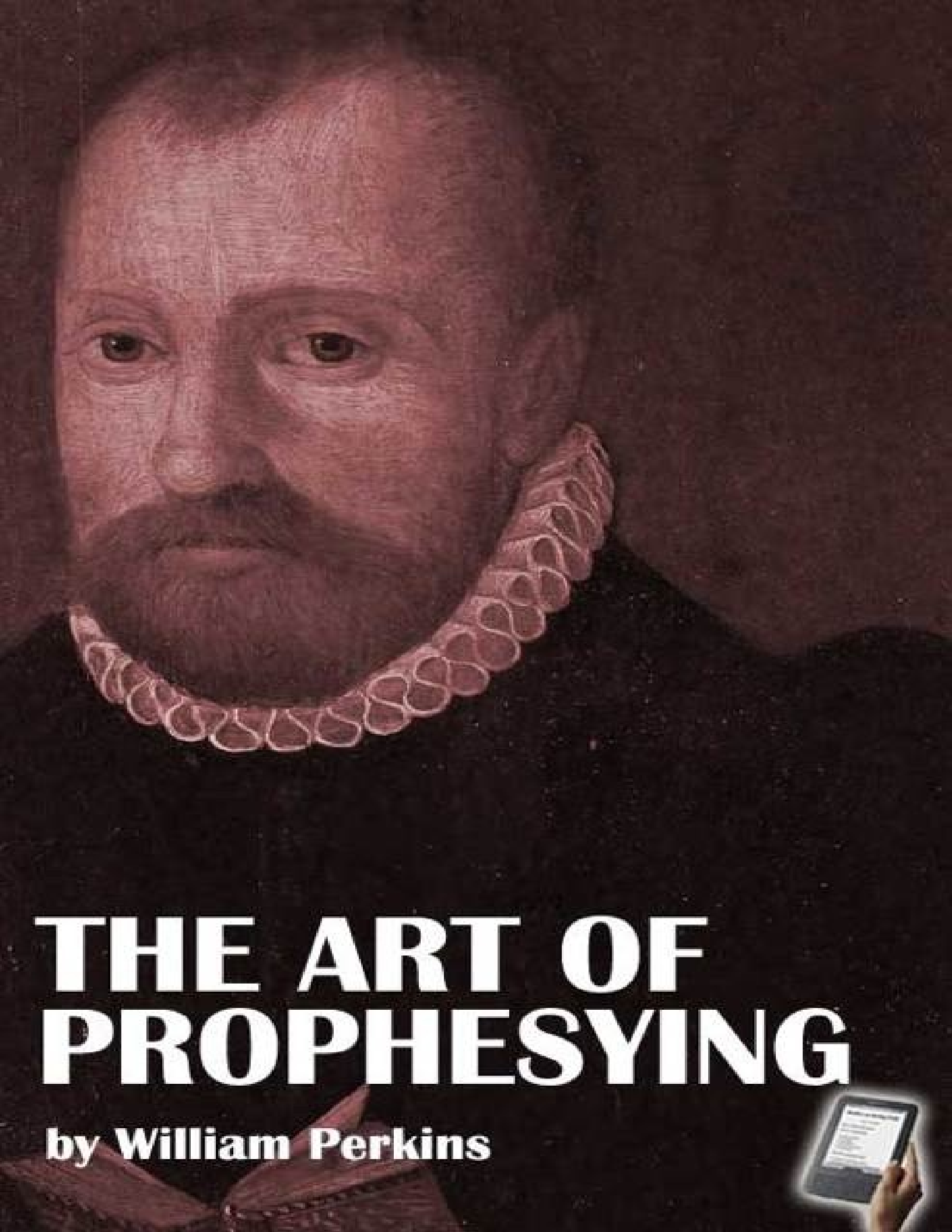
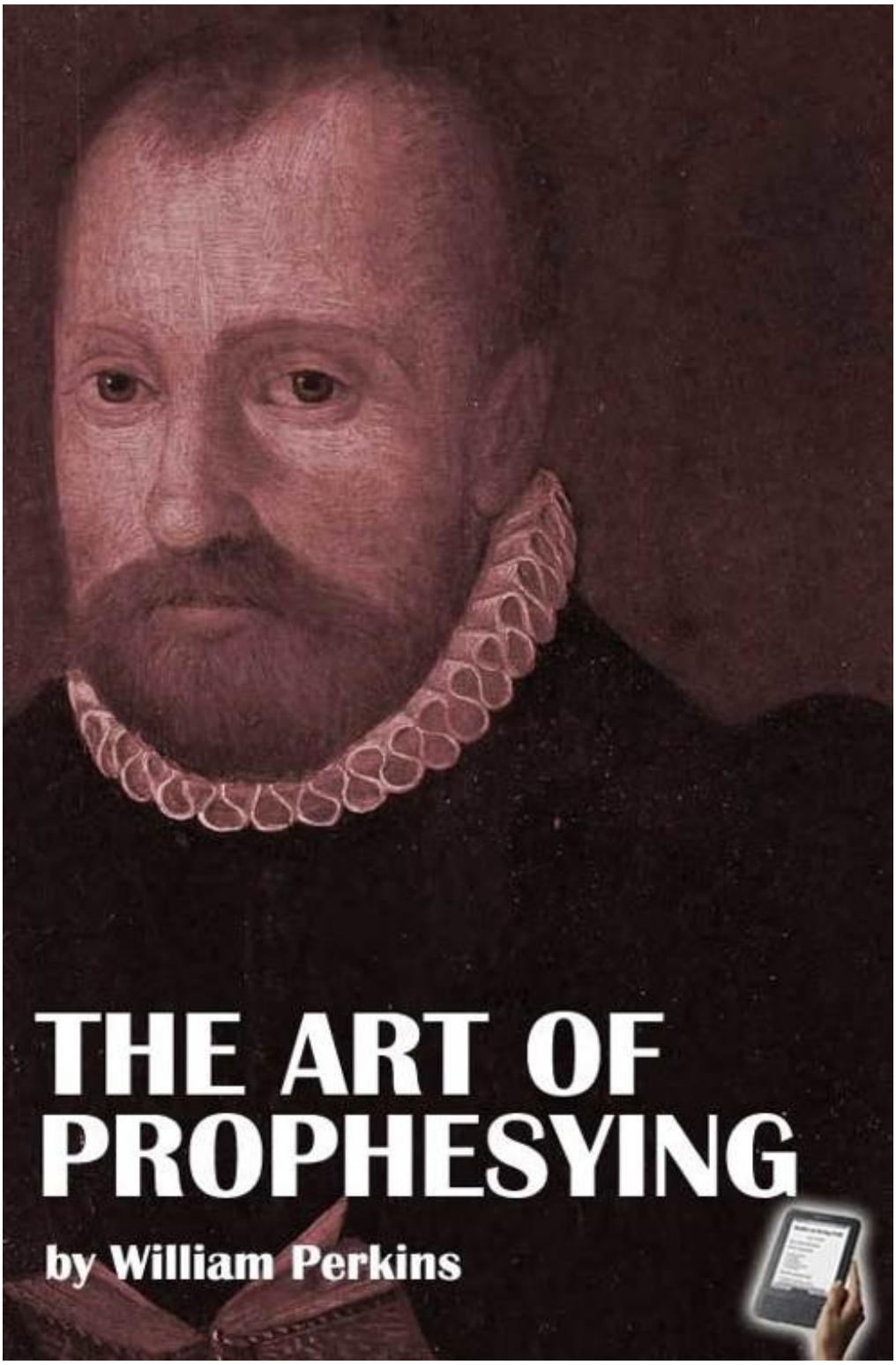


THE ART OF PROPHESYING

by William Perkins



THE ART OF PROPHESYING

WILLIAM PERKINS (1558-1602)

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PREFACE

The pages which follow have been written for faithful ministers of the gospel and for all who are concerned about and pursue the knowledge of holy learning.

The preparation of sermons is an everyday task in the church, but it is still a tremendous responsibility and by no means easy. In fact it is doubtful if there is a more difficult challenge in the theological disciplines than that of homiletics. Its subject matter is prophecy, which is a 'higher gift' indeed (cf. *1 Cor.* 12:31), whether we think about its dignity or its usefulness.

The dignity of the gift of preaching is like that of a lady helped into

and carried along in a chariot, while other gifts of speech and learning stand by like maidservants, conscious of her superiority.

In keeping with this dignity, preaching has a twofold value: (1) It is instrumental in gathering the church and bringing together all of the elect; (2) It drives away the wolves from the folds of the Lord. Preaching is the *flexanima*, the allurer of the soul, by which our self-willed minds are subdued and changed from an ungodly and pagan life-style to a life of Christian faith and repentance. It is also the weapon which has shaken the foundations of ancient heresies, and also, more recently cut to pieces the sinews of the Antichrist. So, if anyone asks which spiritual gift is the 'most excellent', undoubtedly the prize must be given to prophesying.

The better something is, the more it deserves to be carefully presented with a wide variety of rich and wise counsel. But this everyday task is frequently described in a scarcely adequate and even impoverished manner by comparison with the attention other disciplines receive. I have, therefore, carefully studied the writings of the theologians, composed a series of rules and principles from their teaching, and tried to explain them in a way that will be both useful and easily remembered.

I am now committing these reflections on preaching to print - to be approved if they have any value, to be criticised and rejected if they have any inadequacies. If you are persuaded of this style of preaching, walk on with me; if you have some doubts, inquire with me; if you begin to see points at which you have wandered, come back on to the right path with me; if you see that I have strayed, call me back to the road you are on. Your appreciation of me will become disapproval soon enough if you do not like godly and moderate-minded men! But if anyone has petty complaints about these pages - few as they are - my conscience is a strong enough defence against all criticism, because my only concern has been to serve the church of God. So I commit you to him, and this little book on the art of prophesying to you as well as to him.

WILLIAM PERKINS
12 December 1592

INTRODUCTION

> The study of prophesying involves a commitment of the mind to acquire the ability to exercise prophecy rightly. Prophecy (or prophesying) is a solemn public utterance by the prophet, related to the worship of God and the salvation of our neighbours, as the following passages indicate: 'But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men' (*1 Cor.* 14:3). 'But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all' (*1 Cor.* 14:24). 'For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son' (*Rom.* 1:9).

I. THE ART OF PROPHECY

There are two parts to prophecy: preaching the Word and public prayer. For the prophet (that is, the minister of the Word) has only two duties. One is preaching the Word, and the other is praying to God in the name of the people: 'Having ... prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith' (*Rom*. 12:6); 'Restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you shall live' (*Gen*. 20:7). Notice that in Scripture the word 'prophecy' is used of prayer as well as of preaching: 'The sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals' (*1 Chron*. 25:1); 'The prophets of Baal called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon ... And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice . . .' (*1 Kings* 18:26, 29). Thus every prophet's [ask is to speak partly as the voice of God (in preaching), and partly as the voice of the people (in praying): 'If you take out the precious from the vile, You shall be as My mouth' (*Jer*. 15:19); 'And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!"' (*Neh*. 8:6).

Preaching the Word is prophesying in the name and on behalf of Christ. Through preaching those who hear are called into the state of grace, and preserved in it. God has 'given us the ministry of reconciliation

... Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God' (*2 Cor*. 5:18, 20); 'God from the beginning chose you for salvation, through sanctification by the Spirit, and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel' (*2 Thess*. 2:13, 14); 'The gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes' (*Rom*. 1:16); 'Where there is no revelation the people cast off restraint' (*Prov*. 29:18); 'How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?' (*Rom*. 10:14).

II. THE WORD OF GOD

The Word of God alone is to be preached, in its perfection and inner consistency. Scripture is the exclusive subject of preaching, the only field in which the preacher is to labour. 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them' (*Luke* 16:29); 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat [that is, they teach the doctrine of Moses, which they confess].Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do' (*Matt*. 23:2-3).

The Word of God is God's wisdom revealing from heaven the truth which is according to godliness. 'But the wisdom, which is from above is first pure . . .' (*James* 3:17); 'Paul, a bondservant of God ... according to ... the acknowledgement of the truth which accords with godliness' (*Titus* 1:1). The exceptional qualities of the Word, both in its nature and its effects, evoke our admiration.

The Nature of Scripture

The excellency of the nature of Scripture can be described in terms of its perfection, or purity, or its eternity.

Its *perfection* consists either in its sufficiency or its purity. Its sufficiency is such that as the Word of God it is so complete that nothing may be either added to it or taken from it which belongs to its proper purpose: 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul' (*Psa*. 19:7);

'Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it, nor take away from it' (*Deut*. 12:32); 'For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book' (*Rev*. 22:18-19).

The *purity* of Scripture lies in the fact that it stands complete in itself, without either deceit or error: 'The words of the Lord are pure words, Like silver tried in a furnace of earth, Purified seven times' (*Psa*. 12:6).

The *eternity* of the Word is its quality of remaining inviolable. It cannot pass away until everything it commands has been fully accomplished (*Matt*. 5:18).

Effects of Scripture

The exceptional character of the influence of Scripture lies in two things:

1. Its power to penetrate into the spirit of man: 'For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart' (*Heb*. 4:12).

2. Its ability to bind the conscience, that is, to constrain it before God either to excuse or accuse us of sin: 'There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy' (*James* 4:12); 'The Lord is our judge, The Lord is our Lawgiver, The Lord is our King; He will save us' (*Isa*. 33:22).

The Word of God is in the Holy Scriptures. The Scripture is the Word of God written in a language appropriate for the church by men who were immediately called to be the clerks or secretaries of the Holy Spirit: 'for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' (*2 Pet*. 1:21). We speak of it as *canonical* Scripture because it is, as it were, a canon, that is a rule or line used by a master workman, by the aid of which the truth is first

discovered, and then examined: '. . . and as many as walk according to this rule' (*Gal*. 6:16). Consequently the supreme, final determination and judgment of all controversies in the church ought to be made by it.

The sum and substance of the message of the Bible can be summarised in an argument (or syllogism) such as this:

Major Premise: The true Messiah shall be both God and man, from the seed of David. He shall be born of his heavenly Father's bosom. He shall satisfy the law. He shall offer himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the faithful. He shall conquer death by dying and rising again. He shall ascend into heaven. In due time he shall return for judgment.

Minor Premise: Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary, meets all of these requirements.

Conclusion: Therefore Jesus is the true Messiah.

In this syllogism the major premise is the scope or principal burden of the writings of all the prophets. The minor premise is contained in the writings of the evangelists and apostles.

III. THE CONTENTS OF SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures are divided into the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is the first part of Scripture. Written by the prophets in Hebrew (with some parts in Aramaic), it chiefly unfolds the 'old covenant' of works ('Moses and the prophets', *Luke* 16:29). 'And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself' (*Luke* 24:27). It is divided into sixty-six books which are either historical, doctrinal, or prophetic in nature.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Historical Books

The historical books record stories of things which took place, which illustrate and confirm the doctrine which is expounded in other books:

'Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition' (*1 Cor*. 10:11); 'For whatever things were written before were written for our learning' (*Rom*. 15:4). There are fifteen historical books:

1. *Genesis* is a history of the creation, the fall, the first promise of salvation, and of the state of the church preserved and kept within the context of private families.

2. *Exodus* is a history of the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptians. It describes the exodus, the giving of the law, and the tabernacle.

3. *Leviticus* records the regulations for ceremonial worship.

4. *Numbers* is a history of the people's military activity in the land of Canaan.

5. *Deuteronomy* is a commentary which repeats and explains the laws found in the previous books.

6. *Joshua* describes the entrance into and possession of the land of Canaan under Joshua.

7. *Judges* provides a history of the corrupt and hopeless condition of the church and commonwealth of Israel from the days of Joshua up to those of Eli.

8. *Ruth* gives an account of the marriages and posterity of Ruth.

9. *I and II Samuel* record events in the days of the priests Eli and Samuel, and during the reigns of Saul and David.

10. *I and II Kings* narrate what happened in the days of the kings of Israel and Judah.

11. *I and II Chronicles* contain a methodical history of the beginning, increase and ruin of the people of Israel, and help to trace and explain the lineage of Christ.

12. *Ezra* contains a history of the return of the people from captivity in Babylon, and of the beginning of the restoration of the city of Jerusalem.

13. *Nehemiah* describes the restoring of the city which as yet remained unfinished.

14. *Esther* is a history of the preservation of the Jewish church in Persia through the action of Esther.

15. *Job* is a history which traces the causes of his trials and his various conflicts, with their eventually happy outcome.

Doctrinal Books

The dogmatic or doctrinal books are those which teach and prescribe the doctrines of our theology. There are four of them in the Old Testament.

1. *Psalms* contains sacred songs suitable for every condition of the church and its individual members, composed to be sung with grace in the heart (*Col*. 3:16).

2. *Proverbs* serves as a handbook of Christian behaviour and teaches us about piety towards God, and justice towards our neighbour.

3. *Ecclesiastes* reveals the emptiness of all human pleasures to the extent that they are experienced apart from the fear of God.

4. *The Song of Songs* is an allegorical description of the relationship between Christ and the church in terms of the relationship between a bridegroom and his bride (or a husband and wife).

Prophetic Books

The prophetic books contain predictions, either of God's judgments on the sins of the people or of the deliverance of the church which would be finally completed at the coming of Christ. These predictions of the prophets are interspersed with calls to repentance. They almost always

point to the consolation which would be found in Christ by those who repent.

It was characteristic of the prophets to help the memory and understanding of their hearers by recording summaries of sermons which they preached at much greater length: 'Moreover the Lord said to me, "Take a large scroll, and write on it with a man's pen"' (*Isa*. 8:1); 'Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it' (*Hab*. 2:2).

The prophetic books are usually described as 'Major' or 'Minor'. The 'Major' prophets record in detail the things that are foretold; these include the prophecies of *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel* and *Daniel*. Included here too are *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* which express the misery of the Jews about the time of the death of Josiah. The 'Minor' prophets deal more briefly or in less detail with things that are foretold for the future, or at least with some of them. These are: *Hosea*, *Joel*, *Amos*, *Obadiah*, *Jonah*, *Micah*, *Nahum*, *Habakkuk*, *Zephaniah*, *Haggai*, *Zechariah* and *Malachi*.

So much, then, for the Old Testament.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament is the second part of Scripture. Its contents were written in Greek by the apostles, or at least were approved by them (cf. 'built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets', *Eph*. 2:20). They plainly expound teaching on the new covenant. Peter approved the Gospel of Mark, at whose instigation and appointment it was written by John Mark, according to early church tradition. And John the Evangelist also approved the Gospel of Luke. The view reported by Eusebius that two places in Paul's letters (*2 Tim*. 2:8 and *Rom*. 2:16) suggest that he was the author of that Gospel carries little weight. In these verses Paul is not speaking of the gospel as a book, but of his whole ministry, since he adds, 'for which I suffer trouble as an evil doer, even to the point of chains' (*2 Tim*. 2:9).

The New Testament contains histories and letters.

Histories

1. The four Gospels of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke* and *John* contain the narrative of the life, deeds and teaching which Christ showed to the world, from the time of his conception until his ascension into heaven. Of these four authors, two were hearers and eyewitnesses, so that they were able to give greater assurance of the truth of the history.

The difference between the Gospels can be expressed as follows: Matthew gives a clear account of the doctrines which Christ delivered. Mark sets down the history briefly; although his Gospel is not an abridgement of Matthew's Gospel, as Jerome thought. He begins his account in a quite different way, and proceeds in a different order, dealing with some things more generally and also interweaving some new material. Luke aimed at providing an accurate history, and describes events in a certain order. John is almost completely dedicated to displaying the deity of Christ and the benefits which we derive from it.

Jerome distinguished the evangelists from one another by their different approaches. He says Matthew is like a man, because he begins with the manhood of Christ; Mark like a lion, because he begins with the preaching of John the Baptist, which was like the roaring of a lion. He compares Luke to an ox, because he begins with Zechariah the priest offering his sacrifice. He compares John to an eagle, because he soars to the heights, as it were, and begins with the deity of Christ.

2. *The Acts of the Apostles* is an orderly history recording the work of Peter and Paul particularly, and illustrating the governing of the early church (cf. *2 Tim*. 3:10).

3. *Revelation* is a prophetic history of the condition of the church from the age in which John the apostle lived until the end of the world.

Letters

As for the Letters, thirteen of them are from Paul and cover the following themes:

1. Romans: justification, sanctification, and the duties of the Christian life.

2. I Corinthians: reforming abuses in the church at Corinth.

3. II Corinthians: Paul's defence of himself and of his apostleship against his opponents.

4. Galatians: justification by faith without the works of the law.

5. *Ephesians*, 6. *Philippians*, 7. *Colossians*, 8. *I Thessalonians*, 9. *II Thessalonians*: confirm the churches in doctrine and in the duties of the Christian life.

10. *I Timothy*, 11. *II Timothy*: prescribe the form of ordering the church aright.

12. *Titus*: ordering the church in Crete.

13. *Philemon*: the reception of the runaway slave Onesimus.

Hebrews deals with the person and offices of Christ and describes the character of the faith which produces fruit in good works.

James expounds the good works which are to accompany faith.

I and II Peter deal with sanctification and the works of new obedience.

I John expounds the signs of fellowship with God.

II John was written to 'the elect lady' about perseverance in the truth.

III John, addressed to Gaius, is about hospitality and constancy in the good.

Jude emphasises constancy in the faith against the influence of false prophets.

These, then, are the books which belong to the canonical Scriptures.

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

There is strong evidence to show that these books alone, and no others, constitute the Word of God. One kind of proof enables us to know this, the other gives expression to it. Of the former kind there is only one, namely the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures, not only telling an individual within his heart but also effectually persuading him that these books of the Scripture are the Word of God. 'My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth ... from this time and for evermore' (*Isa*. 59:21).

The way in which we are persuaded is as follows. The elect, having the Spirit of God, first of all discern the voice of Christ speaking in the Scriptures. Furthermore, they approve the voice which they discern; and what they approve they also believe. Finally, believing they are (as it were) sealed with the seal of the Spirit. 'In whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise' (*Eph*. 1:13).

The church can bear witness to the canon of Scripture, but it cannot inwardly persuade us of its authority. If that were so the voice of the church would have greater force than the voice of God, and the whole state of man's salvation would be dependent on men. What could be more miserable than that?

More than one objection has been raised against this view by the Roman Catholic Church:

Objection 1: The Scripture is the Word of God by itself, but it is not clear to us that this is so except through the judgment of the church.

Answer. (i) This is an irrelevant contrast. For the first part of it shows the manner in which the Scripture is the Word of God (i.e. by itself as breathed out by God); the latter part shows not *the manner how*, but the person to whom it is the Word of God.

(ii) The Scripture itself testifies to itself with the kind of testimony

which is more certain than all human oaths. For we have the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures, who also works in our hearts a full persuasion of their inspiration, when we are engaged in hearing, reading and meditating on them. We do not believe something because the church says it is to be believed; rather we believe it because what the church says has first of all been said by Scripture.

As a matter of fact the church cannot stand, or its existence be imagined, apart from faith; and faith does not exist apart from the Word. It alone is the rule or object of faith; not the judgment of mere men, even of the holiest men.

(iii) The person who doubts the Scriptures will also doubt the testimony of the church.

Objection 2: The church has a proper role to play in exercising its judgment in determining such matters. Thus the letter which was sent from the special council of apostles and elders in Jerusalem was phrased in these terms: 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us' (*Acts* 15:28).

Answer: (i) The sovereign or supreme judgment in matters of faith is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. The ministry of judgment (or a ministerial judgment) is given to the church only because she must judge according to the Scriptures. Because she does not always do this, she sometimes fails.

(ii) The apostles were present at the council which was held at Jerusalem. They were men whose authority was to be believed in and of itself. But the church's ministry no longer possesses that immediate authority.

Thus the proof of declaration or testimony which the church gives to Scripture does not demonstrate or persuade us that it is God's Word. It only testifies to it and in various ways approves the true canon. Nevertheless, this proof is multi-faceted:

First, there is the perpetual consent of the church to the Scriptures. This begins with believers in the Old Testament period: to them were

committed 'the oracles of God' (*Rom*. 3:2). It continues in the New Testament and the church:

(a) From Christ and the apostles, who cited testimonies out of those books;

(b) From the Fathers: Origen, Melito of Sardis, Athanasius, Cyril, Cyprian, Rufinus, Hilary, Jerome, Epiphanius, Gregory, and so on.

(c) From the Councils of Nicea and Laodicea.

Secondly, there is the partial consent of the pagan thinkers and even enemies of the faith who say the very same things which are taught in Holy Scripture; men such as Homer, Plato, Josephus, Lactantius, Cicero, Virgil, Suetonius, Tacitus and Pliny can be included here.

Thirdly, there is the antiquity of the Word. It contains a record of human history since the beginning of the world. By contrast the oldest secular histories were not written before the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, who lived in the fifth century before Christ.

Fourthly, the origin of Scripture is confirmed by the fulfilment of such prophecies as the calling of the Gentiles, of the Antichrist and of the apostasy of the Jews.

Fifthly, there is the substance of Scripture's teaching: the one true God, the true worship of God, and the truth that God is the Saviour.

Sixthly, the harmony of all the different parts of Scripture.

Seventhly, the remarkable way in which the Scriptures have been preserved through all the periods of peril and times of general revolt the church has experienced.

Eighthly, the effect of Scripture: it converts people, and even although it is completely contrary to their thinking and desires, it wins them to itself.

Nimbly, the simplicity of its words which are full of the majesty of

God.

Lastly, the holy authors did not avoid recording their own corruption; yet Moses commends himself, saying that he was the meekest of all men. That he does both is a further argument for believing that these writers were led by the Holy Spirit. Christ, who is described in the Gospels, clearly claims to be the Son of God, and one with God the Father. He directs all God's glory to himself. If this claim had not been right and true, Christ would have felt the wrath of God as Adam and Herod did, when they sought to make themselves like God. But what, in fact, happened was that God revenged his death upon Herod and upon the Jews, and upon Pilate, and upon those emperors who persecuted the church.

These, then, are the tokens of the divine origin of Scripture. In the light of these considerations it is clear that the Book of Tobit, the Prayer of Manasseh, the Book of Judith, the Book of Baruch, the Epistle of Jeremiah, the additions to Daniel, the Third and Fourth Books of Ezra, the additions to the Book of Esther, I and II Maccabees, the Book of Wisdom, and Ecclesiasticus, are not to be reckoned part of the canon for the following reasons:

1. They were not written by the prophets.

2. They were not written in Hebrew.

3. In the New Testament neither Christ nor the apostles appeal to the testimony of these books.

4. They include false teaching which is contrary to the Scriptures.

IV. THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

Thus far we have discussed the object of preaching. There are two parts to it: the preparation of the sermon, and the preaching of it. Here our Lord's words are relevant: 'Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe, which is instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven, is like a

householder, who brings out of his treasure things new and old'" (*Matt*. 13:52).

PREPARATION

In preparation there must be careful private study. Various scriptures underline this: 'Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine' (*1 Tim*. 4:13); 'Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you' (*1 Pet*. 1:10); 'In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years' (*Dan*. 9:2). Concerning the study of divinity, the following advice should be followed.

First, fix clearly in your mind and memory the sum and substance of biblical doctrine, with its definitions, divisions and explanations.

Secondly, read the Scriptures in the following order. Using grammatical, rhetorical and logical analysis, and the relevant ancillary studies, read Paul's Letter to the Romans first of all. After that, the Gospel of John. These are the keys to the New Testament. Thereafter, the other books of the New Testament will be more easily understood.

When you have completed this, study the doctrinal books of the Old Testament, especially the Psalms; then the prophetic books, especially Isaiah. Lastly, the historical books, particularly Genesis. It is very likely that the apostles and evangelists read Isaiah and the Psalms a great deal, since no other books of the Old Testament are as frequently cited in the New Testament as these are (about sixty passages from both Isaiah and the Psalms).

Thirdly, we ought to get help from orthodox Christian writers, not only from modern times but also from the ancient church. For Satan raises old heresies from the dead in order to retard the restoration of the church which has begun in our own time. The Antitrinitarians have simply painted a new coat of varnish on the views of Arius and Sabellius. The Radical Anabaptists repeat the doctrines of the Essenes, Catharists, Enthusiasts, and Donatists. The Swenkfeldians revive the views of the Eutychians, Enthusiasts and others. Menno follows the Ebionites, and

Roman Catholicism resembles the Pharisees, Encratites, Tatians and Pelagians. The Libertines repeat the views of the Gnostics and Carpocratians. Servetus has revived the heresies of Paul of Samosata, Arius, Eutyches, Marcion and Apollinarius. Lastly, schismatics who separate themselves from evangelical churches revive the opinions, facts and fashions attributed by Cyprian to Pupianus and of the Audians and Donatists.

We do not need to look for any novel way of rejecting and refuting these heresies; the ancient ones found in the Councils and the Fathers are well-tested and still reliable.

Fourthly, anything you come across in your studies that is important and worth noting should be recorded in tables or commonplace books, so that you have both old and new material at hand.

Fifthly, and most important of all, we must earnestly ask God in prayer to open our blind eyes to the meaning of the Scriptures: 'Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law' (*Psa*. 119:18); 'I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire ... and anoint your eyes with eye-salve, that you may see' (*Rev*. 3:18).

Commonplace Books

In connection with composing commonplace books, here is some practical advice:

1. Make a list of the most common headings of every point of doctrine.

2. Divide the right-hand pages of your book into columns, or equal sections lengthwise. Head each of these pages with a major topic, leaving the next page blank, so that extra space may be available.

3. Do not attempt to record everything you read in a book, but only things which are memorable or unusual. Do not write out quotes, but only the principal points with appropriate references. Make a note in the book itself too, so that you will be able to find the place referred to in your

commonplace book.

4. Some things may be more difficult than others to catalogue accurately. You should therefore add an alphabetical table to help you relocate them easily.

5. Do not rely too much on your book. There is no point in writing things down unless they are carefully hidden in your memory too.

Preparation has two parts: the interpretation of the meaning of the passage, and the appropriate division of it for orderly exposition.

Interpretation

Interpretation is the opening up of the words and statements of Scripture in order to bring out its single, full and natural sense.

By contrast with this approach, the Church of Rome believes that passages of Scripture have four senses: the literal, the allegorical, the tropological and the anagogical. An illustration of this can be found in the way the figure of Melchizedek is understood. He offered bread and wine to Abraham (*Gen*. 14:18). The literal sense is that the king of Salem, with the food that he brought, refreshed the soldiers of Abraham, who were tired after their travel. The allegorical sense is that the priest offers up Christ in the mass. The tropological sense is that we are to give to the poor. The anagogical sense is that Christ who is in heaven shall be the bread of life to the faithful.

This pattern of the fourfold meaning of Scripture must be rejected and destroyed. Scripture has only one sense, the literal one. An allegory is only a different way of expressing the same meaning. The anagogy and tropology are ways of applying the sense of the passage.

The principal interpreter of Scripture is the Holy Spirit. The one who makes the law is the best and the highest interpreter of it. The supreme and absolute means for the interpretation is the Scripture itself: 'So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading' (*Neh*. 8:8).

There are, however, three subordinate means to help us to interpret a passage of Scripture: the analogy of faith, the circumstances of the particular passage, and comparison with other passages.

The analogy of faith is a summary of the Scriptures, drawn from its well-known and clear parts. There are two elements in it. The first is related to faith, which is handled in the Apostles' Creed. The second concerns charity or love, which is expounded in the Ten Commandments. 'Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus' (*2 Tim*. 1:13).

The circumstances of a passage can be clarified by the following simple questions: Who is speaking? To whom? On what occasion? At what time? In what place? For what end? What goes before? What follows?

A comparison of different passages involves comparing them with each other so that their meaning may be clearer. 'But Saul ... confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving [i.e. by comparing one thing with another] that this Jesus is the Christ' (*Acts* 9:22).

Comparing different passages may involve two things:

1. The first involves comparing a statement in one context with the other places where it appears in Scripture. For example: 'Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed' (*Isa*. 6:10). This is repeated six times in the New Testament (*Matt*. 13:14; *Mark* 4:12; *Luke* 8:10; *John* 12:40; *Acts* 28:27; *Rom*. 11:8).

When texts are repeated like this they often contain alterations for various reasons. Examples include:

(i) Exegetical: to clarify their exposition. Examples include:

Psalm 78:2 cited in Matthew 13:35
Psalm 78:24 cited in John 6:31

Isaiah 28:16 cited in Romans 9:33
Psalm 110:1 cited in 1 Corinthians 15:25
Psalm 116:10 cited in 2 Corinthians 4:13
Genesis 13:15 cited in Galatians 3:16.

(ii) Diacritical, to distinguish, indicate or clarify places, times and persons, as for example in the citation of Micah 5:2 in Matthew 2:6.

(iii) To limit the sense of a passage to the original intention and meaning of the Holy Spirit. Examples will be found in:

Deuteronomy 6:13 in Matthew 4:10
Isaiah 29:13 in Matthew 15:8
Genesis 2:24 in Matthew 19:5
Isaiah 59:20 in Romans 11:26.

(iv) For application, so that a type might be related to its fulfilment, the general to the special, and vice-versa. Examples include:

Jonah 1:17 in Matthew 12:40
Isaiah 61:1 in Luke 4:18
Psalm 22:18 in John 19:28
Exodus 12:46 in John 19:33
Psalm 69:25 in Acts 1:20.

(v) For the sake of brevity, some things may be omitted. Omission may also occur because the words are not appropriate to the matter in hand. One example of this is the use of Zechariah 9:9 in Matthew 21:5.

2. The second kind of comparison involves comparing one context with another. Again these may be either similar or different. Places that are similar agree with one another in certain respects, perhaps in their phraseology and manner of speech, or in their sense.

Places that agree with respect to *phraseology* include:

Genesis 28:12 and John 1:51
Genesis 3:15 and Romans 16:20
Genesis 8:21 and Ephesians 5:2.

Greek and Hebrew concordances prove very helpful for tracing examples of this kind.

Places which agree in sense are those which have the same meaning. Under this heading we should especially note the comparison of a general principle with a particular illustration of it. For example:

Proverbs 28:13 and Psalm 32:3, 4
2 Samuel 15:25 and 1 Peter 5:6.

So much for places that are similar. Places that are unlike one another apparently do not agree with one another, either in phraseology or meaning. For example:

Romans 3:28 and James 2:24
1 Kings 9:28 and 2 Chronicles 8:18
Acts 7:14 and Genesis 46:27
Acts 7:16 and Genesis 48:22
Zechariah 11:13 and Matthew 27:9.

V. PRINCIPLES FOR EXPOUNDING SCRIPTURE

The Scriptures are to be interpreted according to the nature of the passage which is being handled. These can be classified as either analogical and plain, or cryptic and dark.

Analogical places are those whose apparent meaning is clearly consistent with the analogy of faith. Here this rule is to be followed: If the natural meaning of the words agrees with the circumstances of the passage, then the natural meaning is the proper meaning. For example: 'To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins' (*Acts* 10:43). The meaning of this text is quite clear, namely that Jesus Christ gives righteousness and everlasting life to those who believe in him. We can accept this interpretation immediately because it agrees with the analogy of faith, and with the Scriptures.

We ought further to realise that every article and doctrine which is related to faith and life and necessary for salvation is clearly stated in the Scriptures.

Cryptic or hidden passages are those which are difficult and obscure. For expounding them this rule and guide should be followed: If the natural meaning of the words obviously disagrees with either the analogy of faith or very clear parts of Scripture, then another meaning, one which agrees with both similar and different places, with the circumstances and words of the passage, and with the nature of what is being discussed, must be the right one.

An important example of this principle emerges in connection with interpreting the words, 'This is My body which is broken for you' (*1 Cor*. 11:24). Various interpretations have been given to this statement including: that the bread in the communion is actually the body of Christ, becoming so by conversion (the Roman Catholic view); or that the body of Christ is in, under, or with the bread (the Lutheran view). But to expound these words in either sense would be to disagree with a fundamental article of the faith: Christ 'ascended into heaven', and also with the nature of the sacrament, as a memorial of the absent body of Christ. Consequently another interpretation must be sought.

A different interpretation is that in this context the bread is a sign of the body. In this case the figure of speech known as metonymy is being employed - the name of one thing is used for something else which is related to it. This is an appropriate exposition for the following reasons:

First of all, it agrees with the analogy of faith in two ways:

1. 'He ascended into heaven'; he was taken up locally and visibly from the earth into heaven. Consequently his body is not to be received with the mouth at the communion, but by faith apprehending it in heaven.

2. He was 'born of the virgin Mary'; Christ had a true and natural body which was long, broad, thick, and seated and circumscribed in one particular place. If this is so, the bread in the Supper cannot be his actual body but must be only a sign or pledge of it.

Secondly, this interpretation is consistent with the circumstances described in the passage (*1 Cor*. 11:23-26).

1. 'He took ... He broke it.' It is hardly likely that Christ sitting among his disciples took and broke his own body with his hands! Bread must therefore be no more than a sign and seal.

2. '. . . broken [or given] for you.' The bread cannot be said to be given for us; the body of Christ was. Therefore the bread is not properly the body, but is so symbolically or as a sign.

3. 'The cup is the new covenant,' not literally but by metonymy. Since this is the case, there is no reason then why metonymy is not also used in the words, 'This is My body.'

4. Christ himself ate the bread, but he did not eat himself!

5. 'Do this in remembrance of Me.' These words assume that Christ is not corporeally present to the mouth, but spiritually present to the faith of the heart.

6. 'Till He comes.' These words assume that Christ is absent as to his body.

7. Christ did not speak about being under the form of bread, or in the bread; he said, 'This [that is 'this bread'] is My body.'

Thirdly, this interpretation is consistent with the nature of a sacrament, in which there must be an appropriate relationship and similarity between the sign and the thing signified. But that is impossible if the bread is literally the body.

Fourthly, this interpretation is consistent with other biblical usage (e.g. *Gen*. 17:10, 11; *1 Cor*. 10:4; *Rom*. 4:11; *Exod*. 12:11; *Acts* 22:16; *John* 6:35; *1 Cor*. 10:16).

Fifthly, it agrees with the laws of logic. Things which are essentially different (like bread and a body) cannot be identified in this way except by a figure of speech.

Sixthly, this interpretation fits in with everyday speech. In the ancient world, the fasces (the bundle of rods which were carried before Roman magistrates) were used as a symbol for government itself; the sceptre for the kingdom; the gown for peace; the laurel garland for triumph. To speak of the bread as the body of Christ is a similar figure of speech.

A number of important implications for interpreting the Scriptures follow from this rule of interpretation.

Implications

1. On occasion it is appropriate to supply words which are lacking in the text where this is consistent with the analogy of faith and with the circumstances and words of the context.

Examples of this can be found in Exodus 4:25, 19:4; 2 Samuel 21:16; Luke 13:9; 1 Corinthians 9:25.

2. If an alternative explanation of the text involves changing one noun (or name) for another, this is an indication that a figure of speech is being employed. Some general principles for guidance may be helpful here:

(i) Anthropomorphism is a metaphorical use of language, in which what is appropriate for man is used in describing God. Thus, for example, the 'soul' of God indicates his life or essence: 'Shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?' (*Jer*. 5:29, *Geneva Bible*). 'Head' denotes his superiority: 'the head of Christ is God' (*1 Cor*. 11:3). God's 'face' refers to his favour or his anger: 'You hid Your face, and I was troubled' (*Psa*. 30:7); 'The face of the Lord is against those who do evil' (*Psa*. 34:16). References to his 'eyes' usually indicate his grace and providence: 'The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous' (*Psa*. 34:15). The 'apple of his eye' signifies something especially dear to him: 'he who touches you touches the apple of His eye' (*Zech*. 2:8). A reference to his ears normally indicates his hearing of our prayers. In a similar way, his nostrils represent his indignation, his hands stand for his power and protection, his arm for his strength and fortitude, his right hand for his supreme authority, his finger for virtue, his foot for government and might

(e.g. in *Psa*. 110:1), his smelling for his accepting of something: 'and the Lord smelled a soothing aroma' (*Gen*. 8:21). Repentance is used for the change in things and actions which God executes.

(ii) Sacramental language, or more properly sacramental metonymy, involves the sign being used to denote what it signifies and vice-versa. Thus, for example, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil means the tree which is a sign of these. Similarly, circumcision is called both the covenant and the sign of the covenant (*Gen*. 17:10, 11). Abraham called the place on Mount Moriah where he was about to sacrifice Isaac when God stopped him (and the ram he found caught in a thicket was sacrificed instead) 'Jehovah-jireh' meaning 'The Lord will see or provide.'The place became a sign that the Lord would do so (*Gen*. 22:14). The stone which Jacob had used as a pillow the night he dreamed of the ladder which reached up into heaven is called Bethel, 'God's house' (*Gen*. 28:22). The sign is identified with what it signifies. Similarly the paschal lamb is the passing over (*Exod*. 12). The altar is called 'The Lord is my standard or banner' (*Exod*. 17:15). Jerusalem is named 'The Lord is there' (*Ezek*. 48:35). The priest 'makes atonement' (*Lev*. 16).

In the NewTestament Christ is called a lamb: 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (*John* 1:29). The paschal lamb is called Christ: 'For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us' (*1 Cor*. 5:7). In the same verse Christians are said to be 'unleavened'. Christ is called the propitiation (*hilasterion*) or the cover of the ark of the covenant (*Rom*. 3:25). Christians are said to be 'one bread' (*1 Cor.* 10:17); and the Rock is said to be Christ (10:4). In the same way baptism is the washing of the new birth (*Titus* 3:5); the cup is called 'the new testament', and the bread is said to be the body of Christ (*1 Cor*. 11:24-25). In such cases the sign is said to be the thing signified, but with the understanding that such language employs a figure of speech in which the sign stands for the reality it represents.

(iii) What is called the communication of the properties in Christ (when what is appropriate to his humanity is ascribed to his divine nature) is a synecdoche - the figure of speech in which the whole stands for the part, or vice-versa. Through the union of the divine and the human

natures in the one divine person of Christ, what strictly speaking belongs to only one of his two natures is spoken of the whole person. Examples include: 'to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood' (*Acts* 20:28). 'No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven' (*John* 3:13). 'For had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (*1 Cor*. 2:8). 'Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM"' (*John* 8:58). 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men' (*Luke* 2:52).

This communication of properties applies only in the concrete, not in the abstract. By concrete I mean the whole person, as God, man, Christ; by abstract, either of the two natures considered as Godhead or manhood.

(iv) When something is said of God, which implies his involvement in evil, it must be understood as referring to his working permission. This is commonplace in the Old Testament 'And it yields much increase to the kings You have set over us, Because of our sins; Also they have dominion over our bodies and our cattle at their pleasure; And we are in great distress' (*Neh*. 9:37); 'The Lord has mingled a perverse spirit in her midst; And they have caused Egypt to err in all her work' (*Isa*. 19:14). God thus hardened the heart of Pharaoh (*Exod*. 11:10). Again, 'The Lord your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into your hand, as it is this day' (*Deut*. 2:30). 'For it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them' (*Josh*. 11:20); 'Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the Lord desired to kill them' (*1 Sam*. 2:25). 'The destruction of Ahaziah came of God' (*2 Chron*. 22:7, *Geneva Bible*). 'He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants' (*Psa*. 105:25). 'And if the prophet is induced to speak anything, I the Lord have induced that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him and destroy him from among My people Israel' (*Ezek*. 14:9).

But there are also examples of this in the New Testament: 'God gave them over to a debased mind' (*Rom*. 1:28). 'God will send them strong

delusion, that they should believe the lie' (*2 Thess*. 2:11).

(v) Again, some things are described as if they were already finished. If in fact they are not yet finished, such statements indicate that they have already begun and are on the way to an anticipated fulfilment (e.g. *Gen*. 5:32, 11:26; *1 Kings* 6:2, 37; *Psa*. 119:8). In this way we can understand the kinds of statements made, for example, in Luke 1:6 and Philippians 3:12, 15.

(vi) Moral commandments or laws which mention a specific sin by name imply all sins of the same kind, including their causes and occasions, as well as whatever tempts us to them. They also command the opposite virtues. This is how Christ expounds moral laws in the Sermon on the Mount (see *Matt*. 5:21-48). John illustrates the same principle when he writes: 'Whoever hates his brother is a murderer' (*1 John* 3:15).

(vii) Threats and promises should normally be understood as implying certain conditions. Their outworking depends on whether or not faith and repentance are present in response to them. That is true particularly of some verses (although chastisement and the cross are exceptions to this rule, e.g. Ezekiel 33:14, 15; Jonah 3:4; Revelation 21:18). From what follows in the events themselves it becomes clear that the threat or promise was to be understood conditionally (e.g. *Jer*. 18:9, 10). Similar examples include Isaiah 38:1 and Genesis 20:3. Here, clearly, the outworking of God's will is involved, hence the distinction that was drawn by the scholastic theologians between the signifying will of God and the will of his good pleasure. By his *will of good pleasure* is meant that God wills something absolutely and simply without any conditions, such as the creation and governing of the world, or the sending of his Son. By his *signifying will* is meant that he wills some things with a view to some other thing, and as a condition of it. Because the condition annexed indicates the presence of God's will we are able to say that he does so will.

(viii) Superlative or exclusive speech used of one person of the Godhead does not exclude the other persons. It denies only creatures and false gods to which the true God, whether in one person or in more,

is opposed. Thus Jesus calls the Father the only true God, but only to oppose him to all false gods (*John* 17:3). Further examples can be found in Mark 13:27, Romans 16:27; 1 Timothy 1:17. John 10:29 is an obvious example: 'My Father ... is greater than all' does not mean greater than the other persons of the Trinity, but greater than all creatures. All the outward works of the Trinity, and all divine attributes are to be understood inclusively; they apply without exception to any of the persons.

(ix) When God is considered absolutely, or by himself, all three persons of the Trinity are meant. When the word 'God' is used along with another person of the Trinity, it denotes the Father (e.g. *2 Cor*. 13:13).

(x) A general word may have a particular meaning and vice-versa. Thus 'all' may mean 'many', and 'many' may mean 'all' (as Augustine made clear). We see this frequently in Scripture (e.g. *Gen*. 33:11; *Exod*. 9:6; *Deut*. 28:64; *1 Kings* 12:18; *Jer*. 8:6, 26:9; *Matt*. 4:23, 21:26; *John* 14:13; *1 Cor*. 6:12; *Phil*. 2:21). 'Nothing' may mean 'little' or 'small' (*John* 18:20; *Acts* 27:33). 'None' can be used for 'few' (*Jer*. 8:6; *1 Cor*. 2:8). 'Always' may mean 'often' or 'long' (*Prov*. 13:10; *Luke* 18:1, 24:53; *John* 18:29). 'Eternal' may mean 'a long time' if that suits the context best (e.g. *Gen*. 17:8; *Lev*. 25:46; *Deut*. 15:17; *1 Chron*. 15:2; *Isa*. 34:6; *Dan*. 2:4; *Jer*. 25:9). 'Everywhere' can mean 'here and there' (*Mark* 16:20; *Acts* 17:30). A negative is often limited in its significance to one particular matter (e.g. in *Psa*. 7:4; *John* 9:3). 'Not' may mean 'seldom', 'scarcely', or 'hardly' (*1 Kings* 15:5; *Luke* 2:37).

3. The grammatical and rhetorical properties of words indicate their difference nuances of meaning:

Ellipsis (when one or more words are lacking) indicates brevity, or it may be an expression of deep emotion (*Gen*. 3:22, 11:4; *Exod*. 22:20, 23; *1 Chron*. 4:10; *Psa*. 6:3; *Acts* 5:39).

The exchange of the perfect tense, in which the past is used to express what will happen in the future indicates the certainty of what will happen (*Gen*. 20:3; *Isa*. 9:6, 21:9).

Pleonasm (repetition of a word or words), in the case of a simple

repetition of the vocabulary, indicates: (i) Force and emphasis; the words signify more than their ordinary meaning (*Psa*. 133:2; *Luke* 6:46). (ii) A multitude (*Gen*. 32:16; *Joel* 3:14). (iii) Distribution (*Lev*. 17:3; *1 Chron*. 26:13; *2 Chron*. 19:5). (iv) Diversity and variety (*Psa*. 12:2; *Prov*. 20:10).

A different form of pleonasm occurs when one noun is governed by another. In the singular this is very significant and argues certainty (*Exod*. 31:15; *Mic*. 2:4). In the plural it signifies excellency as, for example, in Song of Songs; servant of servants (cf. also *Psa*. 136:2; *Eccles*. 1:2).

Pleonasm in the case of an adjective (sometimes also Of a noun) signifies exaggeration or increase (*Exod*. 34:6; *Prov*. 6:10; *Isa*. 6:3; *Jer*. 7:4, 22:29, 24:3; *Ezek*. 21:28). In the case of a verb it either makes the speech more emphatic and significant, or else indicates and expresses vehemency, certainty, or speed (*Gen*. 2:7, 46:4; *Exod*. 13:17; *2 Sam*. 15:30; *2 Kings* 5:11, 8:10; *Psalms* 50:21, 109:10; *Prov*. 27:23; *Isa*. 6:9, 50:2, 55:2, 56:3; *Jer*. 12:16, 33:39).

Pleonasm in the case of a conjunction may indicate earnestness (*Ezek*. 13:10). A conjunction doubled increases the force of the denial (e.g. *Exod*. 14:11; *Matt*. 13:14).

Pleonasm in an entire sentence implies first, distribution (*Ezek*. 46:21); secondly, emphasis (*Exod*. 12:50; *Psalms* 124:1, 145:18); thirdly, the repetition of a sentence in different words is for elucidation (*2 Kings* 20:3; *Psa*. 6:9,10; *Isa*. 3:9; *John* 1:3).

All figures of speech are emphatic in function. They enlarge the sense of what is said. But in addition to giving literary and aesthetic pleasure they also serve to nourish faith, for example when Christ is put for the Christian, or for the church of God (*Matt*. 25:35; *Acts* 9:4). This certainly brings comfort to the faithful soul, and nourishes faith.

Irony (when what is meant is the opposite of what is actually said, sometimes in the context of mocking) often implies a rebuke for sin (*Judg*. 10:14; *1 Kings* 18:27, 22:15; *Mark* 7:9; *1 Cor*. 4:8).

Figures of speech which involve the repetition of a word or sound,

are used for emphasis (*Psa*. 67:5, 6; *Isa*. 48:11; *John* 1:51). There is a remarkable example of this in Psalm 136 where repetition is used in every single verse.

A *question* may indicate various things: a strong affirmation (e.g. *Gen*. 4:7, 37:13; *Josh*. 1:9; *1 Kings* 20:27; *Mark* 12:24; *John* 4:35, 6:7, 10:13); a denial (e.g. *Gen*. 18:4; *Matt*. 12:26; *Rom*. 3:3); forbidding (*2 Sam*. 2:22; *Psa*. 79:10); the presence of emotions like admiration, compassion, complaining and fault-finding (*Psalms* 8:10, 22:1; *Isa*. 1:21. A concession indicates a denial and rebuke (as in *2 Cor*. 12:16, 17).

4. Apparent contradictions in Scripture can often be resolved by realising that the passages deal with different things although the vocabulary may be the same, or they may be dealing with different aspects, or perspectives or even different time-frames.

Examples of this include Psalm 7:8 ('Judge me ... according to my righteousness') and Isaiah 64:6 ('all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags'). The apparent contradiction between these two statements is resolved when we realise that they are dealing with different concerns, the righteousness of the cause in the one case and that of the individual in the other. Psalm 7 speaks of the former; Isaiah 64 of the latter.

Matthew 10:9, 10 ('Provide neither gold . . . nor sandals, nor staffs') and Mark 6:8, 9 ('take nothing ... except a staff ... but ... wear sandals') provide us with another example. Here the texts seem to contradict one another unless we recognise that Matthew's account speaks of a staff as a burden to its bearers, while Mark is thinking of a staff's value in sustaining and easing the journey of a traveller - such as Jacob used (*Gen*. 32:10). Again, the shoes that Matthew mentions are new ones, carefully packed for travel. By contrast the sandals in Mark are not new, but are the kind that would have been daily worn on the feet.

Various conditions and caveats should be observed hcrc in harmonising biblical passages.

(i) The writers of Scripture sometimes speak of places and people from the past in terms of the customs of the time and place in which they

themselves wrote. An example of this is found in Genesis 12:8: 'And he moved It from there to the mountain east of Bethel'. The place was called Bethel in the days of Moses; but in Abraham's time it was called Luz (*Gen*. 28:19). Genesis 13:1 records that 'Abraham went up from Egypt ... to the south'. Here 'south' does not mean 'south from Egypt', but south of where Moses was when he wrote. Again, we are told that Christ in his Spirit preached to those in prison *1 Pet*. 3:19). They are said to be in prison with respect to the time when Peter wrote his letter, not the time in which Noah lived. Again, in the context of the patriarchs, God says in Psalm 105:15: 'Do not touch My anointed ones.' The experience of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is here being described in terms of the ritual of the days in which David lived. The patriarchs did not receive external anointing.

(ii) Allegories or passages marked by literary symbolism should be expounded according to the scope or focus of the context. Thus Chrysostom says on Matthew 8: 'Parables must not be expounded according to the letter, lest many absurdities follow.' Similarly, Augustine says in connection with Psalm 8: 'In every allegory this rule is to be retained, that that be considered according to the purpose of the present place, which is there spoken of under a similitude.'

(iii) The same places and people in Scripture may have two different names. Gideon was called both Jerubbaal (*Judg*. 6:32) and Jerubbesheth (*2 Sam*. 11:21). Then the same name may appear in different forms. So, Salmon (*Ruth* 4:21) is called Salmah [Solomon] (*2 Chron*. 2:11). On the other hand, different people and places may share the same name. One example of this is found in the genealogy with which Matthew's Gospel begins: 'Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel' (*Matt*. 1:11, 12). The name 'Jeconiah' concludes the second of the three groups of fourteen into which the genealogy is divided and also begins the third. If this is the same individual, there must be only thirteen people in either the second or the third group. But if there were two men called Jeconiah, a father and son, the problem is resolved.

Succoth is the name of three different places in Scripture. The first is

in Egypt (*Exod*. 12:37); the second is in the land of the tribe of Gad (*Josh*. 13:27); the third in the land of the tribe of Manasseh (*1 Kings* 7:46).

(iv) Sometimes in Scripture, because of the sinful lifestyle of a ruler his name or the number of years during which he reigned wickedly may be omitted. 'Saul reigned two years over Israel' (*1 Sam*. 13:1); that is, lawfully, or as Lyra says, *de jure* (according to law or equity); but otherwise he reigned longer. We have a further example in Matthew 1:8: 'Joram begot Uzziah.' Here three kings are simply omitted because of their wickedness, namely Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah.

(v) Time periods may be noted in complete or incomplete form. They may also be reckoned inclusively or exclusively. There is an example of this in 1 Kings 15:25 and 1 Kings 15:28. Nadab, who began to reign in the *second year* of Asa can be said to reign two years, although Baasha is said to have succeeded him in the *third year* of Asa. Obviously the final 'year' of a king's reign did not last for a complete year, since it was cut short by his death. On occasion (as here) the last 'year' might scarcely last a month or more. The remainder of the year would then count as a complete 'year' of the reign of any successor.

We find another apparent contradiction in chronology if we compare Matthew 17:1 with Luke 9:28. But this is resolved if we recognise that Matthew is counting only complete days while Luke also includes the part days on either side of them. Thus, despite appearances, there is no real contradiction between Matthew's 'six days' and Luke's 'about eight days'. Sometimes a time period is numbered inclusively and sometimes exclusively. There may be various reasons for this, it may simply be a preference for using a perfect number. Augustine says on Exodus, 'In a perfect number oft-times that, which is either wanting or abounding, is not counted.' Thus, for example: 'While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages ... for three hundred years' (*Judg*. 11:26). These years from the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt, can be calculated as follows:

The wilderness wandering: 40 years

The leadership of Joshua: 17 years

Of Othniel:	40 years
Of Ehud and Shamgar:	80 years
Of Barak:	40 years
Of Gideon:	40 years
Of Abimelech:	3 years
Of Tola:	23 years
Of Jair:	22 years

The total is 305 years (not 300). The reason the extra five years are not mentioned is simply because the round number is easier to work with.

Again, a round number may be used simply for brevity: 'So all who fell of Benjamin that day were twenty-five thousand men' (*Judg*. 20:46). Here (as a glance at Judges 20:35 will indicate) a hundred Benjamites are not included.

(vi) A further consideration in interpreting the narratives of Old Testament history is the fact that when a king was hindered from exercising his role within the nation either by foreign war or old age, or because of some disease, he might appoint his son king in his place while he was still alive. In such co-regencies the calculations of the length of the reigns of the father and son sometimes include the years of joint reign, but at other times take account only of the years of the individual's reign.

This helps to resolve the difference between 2 Kings 1:17 and 2 Kings 3:1. In the seventeenth year of his reign Jehoshaphat determined to help king Ahab against the Syrians, and appointed his son Joram to be viceroy. In the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat's reign (the second of his son's) Joram the son of Ahab reigned. Afterwards in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, Jehoshaphat, now languishing in old age, confirmed his kingdom to Joram, who is then said to have reigned eight years: four while his father was alive, and four by himself after the death of his father.

Another illustration will be found by comparing 2 Kings 15:30 (which implies that Jotham reigned for twenty years) with 2 Kings 15:33 (which

suggests that he reigned for only sixteen years). The difficulty is easily resolved. Jotham reigned for sixteen years on his own after the death of his father Uzziah; but in addition he reigned for four further years along with his father (i.e. twenty years in total) since he governed the kingdom for his father when the latter had leprosy.

(vii) In the ancient Near-East, the day was artificially divided both into 12 equal hours (commonly called planetary hours, cf. *John* 11:9) and into quadrants, each of which was denoted by the number of the hour with which the period began. This enables us to harmonise Mark 15:25 which says that Jesus was crucified at 'the third hour' with John 19:14 which states that it was already 'about the sixth hour' when Pilate presented Jesus to the Jews. These two numbers belong to different frames of reference. Different ways of counting the hours of the day are in view. Hence Christ may be said to have been crucified at the *third* hour, although he had not yet been taken to Golgotha at the *sixth* hour.

(viii) A lesser number is included in a greater and more complete number. 'So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died' (*Judg*. 3:11). This figure includes the years reckoned from the death of Joshua to the death of Othniel, as well as the eight years of bondage under the Syrians. 'The land had rest for eighty years' (*Judg*. 3:30). Here from the death of Othniel are included the years of both Ehud and Shamgar. For Ehud could not have been judge for eighty years which would be more than a lifespan. Similar instances occur in Judges 5:31; 8:28; 9:22; 10:2, 3 and 11:26 where the forty years of the wanderings in the desert are included in the figure of three hundred years.

(ix) Sonship can be either natural or legal. Natural sonship is by generation, while legal is by adoption, testified by education and upbringing, and by succession in the kingdom, and also, in the case of levitate sonship by the law of redemption (see *Deut*. 25:5).

5. When the natural sense of a passage can be determined with the help of these principles, the meaning which is most appropriate to the context should be assumed for any word which is open to a range of meaning.

Thus, for example, the Hebrew word for 'and', *waw*, can be translated in a variety of ways, according to the context - as: 'but', 'since', 'indeed', 'that is', 'for that reason', 'so', and by many similar terms.

Again, the Hebrew word *barak* can indicate such opposite ideas as to bless and to curse (*Job* 1:5; *1 Kings* 21:10 and 11:2, 9). And *chalal* in Genesis 4:26 does not mean 'profane' (as it sometimes does) but 'begin', for two reasons. (i) When it means to profane it should be joined with the noun which it governs; but here it is followed immediately by the infinitive of the verb to call, *qara*. (ii) Moses did not count the profanation of the worship of God as one of the reasons for the flood; but that would certainly have been noted if it had been prevalent among the people of God.

6. In our English Bibles, marginal references sometimes mention a Greek or Hebrew word indicating that there is some variation in the extant manuscripts of the passage. The correct reading is the one which (i) agrees with the grammatical construction, and with other reliable manuscripts. (ii) makes sense of the context and thrust of the passage and agrees with the analogy of faith.

I mention this as a principle of interpretation, not because I think that our copies of the Hebrew and Greek text were corrupted through the malicious activity of the Jews, as Lindanus (followed by the Roman Church) argues. I mention it simply so that the various readings - which have arisen either through a lack of skill or negligence and oversight on the part of those who made copies of the text - might be scanned and the correct reading determined.

For example, in most copies of the Hebrew text, Psalm 22:16 reads *kaari*, meaning '*As a lion* my hands and my feet.' But in some copies of the Hebrew the reading is different: *kaaru*, '*They have digged* (*or pierced*) my hands and my feet.' The rule we have adopted would indicate that the latter reading is to be followed since it agrees with (i) the grammatical construction; (ii) the circumstances of the psalm; (iii) some ancient copies, as the Jews themselves recognise.

VI. RIGHTLY HANDLING THE WORD OF GOD

So far we have been considering the interpretation of Scripture. Now we come to consider the right 'cutting', or 'dividing' of it. Right cutting is the way in which the Word is enabled to edify the people of God: 'Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing [or cutting] the word of truth' (*2 Tim*. 2:15).

The idea of cutting here is metaphorical language possibly derived from the activity of the Levites, who were required to cut the limbs of the animals they sacrificed with great care. It is of this skill that the Messiah speaks: 'The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary' (*Isa*. 50:4).

There are two elements in this: (i) resolution or partition, and (ii) application.

Resolution

Resolution is the unfolding of the passage into its various doctrines, like the untwisting and loosening of a weaver's web. Apollos was highly skilled in doing this: 'for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ' (*Acts* 18:28).

Sometimes the doctrine is explicitly stated in the passage. This is already illustrated in New Testament references to the Old Testament: 'We have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one' (*Rom*. 3:9-11). Another example is found in Acts 2:24-27.

On other occasions a doctrine not specifically stated is correctly drawn from the text because, in one sense or another, it is implied in what is written. There are many illustrations of how this is done in

Scripture itself. For example:

BIBLICAL TEXT	IMPLICATION DRAWN FROM THE TEXT
John 10:34: Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, you are gods"'?	John 10:35: If He called them gods to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken): 36: Do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming', because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?
1 Corinthians 9:9: For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain.' Is it oxen God is concerned about?	1 Corinthians 9:4: Do we have no right to eat and drink?
Galatians 3:10: For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.'	Galatians 3:9: So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.
Galatians 3:11: For 'the just shall live by faith'.	Galatians 3:11: But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident.
Hebrews 8:8: Because	Hebrews 8:13: In that He

finding fault with them, He says: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house Israel and with the house of Judah'.	says, 'A new covenant', He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

In elucidating doctrines we must bear in mind that an example that is ethical, economic, political, ordinary or extraordinary has the force of a general rule within its own sphere. The examples of the fathers are patterns for us, as Paul indicates: 'Now all these things ... were written for our admonition' (*1 Cor*. 10:11). It is a principle in logic that the genus is present in all the species, just as it is a rule in visual perception that the general species of things are perceived before the particular.

Romans 9:7: Nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called'. 10: And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac . . .	Romans 9:8: That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.
Romans 4:18: Abraham, contrary to hope, etc. 21: Being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. 22: And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness.'	Romans 4:23: Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him. 24: But also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Note, however, that doctrines ought to be deduced from passages only when it is proper and valid to do so. They must be derived from the

genuine meaning of the Scripture. Otherwise we will end up drawing any doctrine from any place in the Bible.

An example of such a mistake is the way in which Proverbs 8:22 has been handled. In this passage Wisdom, that is Christ, is speaking about himself. According to the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) the passage reads: 'The Lord has created me.' From this translation the Arians perversely argued that the Son was created. But the Hebrew text reads: 'The Lord has *possessed* me' (the Hebrew verb is *qanah*). The Father *possesses* the Son, because he was begotten of the Father from eternity, and because the Father is in the Son, and the Son in the Father. And so when a son was born to Adam he said he had *possessed* a man from the Lord' (*Gen*. 4:1; again the Hebrew verb is *qanah*). The error here perhaps arose because of a scribal error (accidental or deliberate) in the Greek text.

In the same way, Augustine comments on Psalm 39:10, reading the text: 'I held my peace because thou hast made me: He makes the subtle application that it is a marvel that he - who had been given a mouth to enable him to speak - should hold his tongue. But the word 'me' is in neither the Hebrew nor the Greek text. Again, in his comments on Psalm 72:14 he discusses the question of money-lending for interest and proves that this is sinful. But there is nothing about this in the text! It reads: 'He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; And precious shall be their blood in His sight.'

It is also legitimate to develop analogies or allegories. These are arguments drawn from things that are like each other. Paul used them often (e.g. *1 Cor*. 9:9). But they are to be employed with the following caveats:

1. They should be used sparingly and soberly.

2. They must not be far-fetched, but appropriate to the matter in hand.

3. They must be mentioned briefly.

4. They should be used for practical instruction not to prove a point of doctrine.

Any point of doctrine drawn from a text by proper interpretation should be believed on its own authority. This is an adequate basis for believing it. 'Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus ... for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ' (*Acts* 18:24, 28). It follows from this that:

1. We should not rest our faith on human testimonies, either from the philosophers, or the Fathers. Augustine comments on Psalm 66 thus: 'If I speak, let no man hear; if Christ speak, woe be to him that does not hear.' Again he says, 'Let us not hear, "these things I say, these things he says": but let us hear, "These things the Lord says".' Yet with this exception: 'Unless they convince the conscience of the hearer.' It was in this way that Paul appealed to the testimony of Ararus, 'For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said; "For we are also His offspring. Therefore, since we are the offspring of God . . ."' (*Acts* 17:28, 29). Similarly he cites the saying of Menander, 'Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits"' (*1 Cor*. 15:33). Again, he quotes Epimenides: 'One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons"' (*Titus* 1:12).

But if such secular authors are quoted, it must be sparingly. In fact the biblical precedents actually omit the names of the authors in such instances.

2. Only a few testimonies of Scripture should be used for the proof of the doctrine; sometimes there is need of none.

3. The prophets who expound their teaching in this way are not to be criticised by other prophets (see *1 Cor*. 14:32, 37).

VII. USE AND APPLICATION

Application is the skill by which the doctrine which has been properly

drawn from Scripture is handled in ways which are appropriate to the circumstances of the place and time and to the people in the congregation. This is the biblical approach to exposition: "'I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down," says the Lord God. "I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick'" (*Ezek*. 34:15, 16). 'And on some have compassion, making a distinction, but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire' (*Jude* 22, 23).

The basic principle in application is to know whether the passage is a statement of the law or of the gospel. For when the Word is preached, the law and the gospel operate differently. The law exposes the disease of sin, and as a side-effect stimulates and stirs it up. But it provides no remedy for it. However the gospel not only teaches us what is to be done, it also has the power of the Holy Spirit joined to it. When we are regenerated by him we receive the strength we need both to believe the gospel and to do what it commands. The law is, therefore, first in the order of teaching; then comes the gospel.

A statement of the law indicates the need for perfect inherent righteousness, of eternal life given through the works of the law, of the sins which are contrary to the law and of the curse that is due them. 'For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no-one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith' (*Gal*. 3:10). 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come ... And even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire' (*Matt*. 3:7, 10). By contrast, a statement of the gospel speaks of Christ and his benefits, and of faith being fruitful in good works. For example, 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life' (*John* 3:16).

For this reason many statements which seem to belong to the law are, in the light of Christ, to be understood not legally but as qualified by the gospel. 'Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'

(*Luke* 11:28). 'For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off ... But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it' (*Deut*. 30:11, 14). This same sentence which is legal in character in Moses, is evangelical in character in Paul (*Rom*. 10:8). 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart!' (*Psa*. 119:1, 2). 'He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me, And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father ... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him' (*John* 14:21, 23). 'Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations, Noah walked with God' (*Gen*. 6:9). 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless' (*Gen*. 17:1).

There are basically seven ways in which application should be made, in keeping with seven different spiritual conditions.

Categories of Hearers

1. Those who are unbelievers and are both ignorant and unteachable. These must first of all be prepared to receive the doctrine of the Word. Jehoshaphat sent Levites throughout the cities of Judah to teach the people, and to draw them away from idolatry (*2 Chron*. 17:9). This preparation should be partly by discussing or reasoning with them, in order to become aware of their attitude and disposition, and partly by reproving any obvious sin, so that their consciences may be aroused and touched with fear and they may become teachable (see *Acts* 9:3-5; 16:27-31; 17:17; 17:22-24).

When there is some hope that they have become teachable and prepared, the message of God's Word is to be given to them, usually in basic terms concentrating on general points (as, for example, Paul did at Athens, *Acts* 17:30, 31). If there is no positive response to such teaching, then it should be explained in a more detailed and comprehensive way. But if they remain unteachable and there is no real hope of winning them, they should simply be left (*Prov*. 9:8; *Matt*. 7:6; *Acts* 19:9).

2. Those who are teachable, but ignorant. We should instruct such

people by means of a catechism (cf. *Luke* 1:4; *Acts* 18:25, 26). A catechism is a brief explanation of the foundational teaching of the Christian faith given in the form of questions and answers. This helps both the understanding and the memory. The content of a catechism, therefore, should be the fundamentals of the Christian faith, a summary of its basic principles (*Heb*. 5:12).

A principle of the faith is a biblical truth which is directly and immediately concerned both with the salvation of men and the glory of God. If it is denied and rejected there are no grounds for us to hope for salvation. There are six such principles: repentance, faith, baptism (that is the sacraments), the laying on of hands (that is a synecdoche for the ministry of the Word), the resurrection, and the last judgment (*Heb*. 6:1-3).

The distinctive form of a catechism is the way it handles the elements or foundation points plainly by question and answer (*Acts* 8:37; *1 Pet*. 3:21). As Tertullian put it, 'The soul is not purged with washing, but with answering.'

Here it is important to recognise the difference between 'milk' and 'strong meat'. These categories refer to the same truth; the difference between them lies in the manner and style of the teaching. 'Milk' is a brief, plain and general explanation of the principles of the faith: that we must believe in one God, and in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; that we must rely only upon the grace of God in Christ; that we ought to believe in the forgiveness of sins; and when we are taught that we ought to repent, to abstain from evil and to do good.

'Strong meat', on the other hand, is a detailed, full, illuminating and clear handling of the doctrine of faith. It includes careful and lucid exposition of biblical teaching on such themes as: the condition of man before the fall, the fall, original and actual sin, human guilt, free-will; the mysteries of the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, their union in one person, the office of Christ as Mediator, the imputation of righteousness; faith, grace, and the use of the law. 'Milk' must be set before babes, that is those who are immature or weak in knowledge; strong meat should be given to those who are more mature, that is to those who are better

instructed (*1 Cor*. 3:1, 2; *Heb*. 5:13).

3. There are those who have knowledge, but have never been humbled. Here we need to see the foundation of repentance stirred up in what Paul calls godly sorrow (*1 Cor*. 7:8-10). Godly sorrow is grief for sin simply because it is sin. To stir up this affection, the ministry of the law is necessary. This may give birth to a real sense of contrition in the heart, or to terror in the conscience. Although this is not wholesome and profitable on its own, it provides a necessary remedy for subduing sinful stubbornness, and for preparing the mind to become teachable.

In order to arouse this legal sorrow it is appropriate to use some choice section of the law, which may reprove any obvious sin in those who have not yet been humbled. Sorrow for and repentance from even one sin is in substance sorrow for and repentance of all sin (*Psa*. 32:5; *Acts* 2:23, 8:22).

Further, if someone who is afflicted with the cross and with outward tragedies has only a worldly sorrow - that is if he does not mourn for sin as sin, but only for the punishment of sin - he is not to be given immediate comfort. Such sorrow must first be transformed into godly sorrow. Think about the analogy of medical healing. If a man's life is in danger because of the amount of blood he is losing from a nose-bleed, his physicians may prescribe that blood be let out of his arm, or from some other suitable place, in order to staunch the flow of blood from his nose. Their motive, of course, is to save someone who is in danger of death.

Then let the gospel be preached in such a way that the Holy Spirit effectually works salvation. For in renewing men so that they may begin to will and to do what is pleasing to God, the Spirit really and truly produces in them godly sorrow and repentance to salvation.

To the hard-hearted the law must be stressed, and its curse stated clearly along with its threats. The difficulty of obtaining deliverance until people are pricked in their heart should also be taught (*Matt*. 3:7; 19:16, 17; 23:13, 33). But when the beginning of genuine sorrow appears they are to be comforted with the gospel.

4. Those who have already been humbled. Here we must carefully consider whether the humbling that has already taken place is complete and sound or only just begun and still light or superficial. It is important that people do not receive comfort sooner than is appropriate. If they do they may later become hardened in the same way iron which has been cast into the furnace becomes exceptionally hard when it is cold.

Here are some guidelines for dealing with those who are partially humbled. Expound the law to them carefully tempered with the gospel, so that being terrified by their sins and the judgment of God they may at the same time find comfort in the gospel (*Gen*. 3:9-15; *2 Sam*. 12; *Acts* 8:20-23). Nathan gives us an example here. Having been sent from God, he recalled David to an awareness of his true condition through a parable, and then pronounced him pardoned when his repentance was certain.

In this way faith and repentance and the comforts of the gospel ought to be taught and offered to those who have been fully humbled (*Matt*. 9:13; *Luke* 4:18; *Acts* 2:37, 38).

5. Those who already believe. We must teach them:

(i) The gospel: the biblical teaching on justification, sanctification and perseverance.

(ii) The law: but as it applies to those who are no longer under its curse, so that they may be taught how to bear the fruit of a new obedience in keeping with their repentance (*Rom*. 8:1; *1 Tim*. 1:9). Here Paul's teaching in Romans serves as a model.

(iii) Although someone who is righteous and holy in the sight of God should not be threatened with the curse of the law, the opposition of the law to their remaining sin should still be stressed. As a father may show his sons what he will do as punishment to induce a proper sense of fear of doing wrong, so meditation on the curse of the law should be frequently encouraged in true believers, to discourage abusing the mercy of God by sinful living, and to increase humility. Our sanctification is partial as yet. In order that the remnants of sin may be destroyed we must always begin with meditation on the law, and with a sense of our

sin, in order to be brought [o rest in the gospel.

6. Those who have fallen back. Some may have partly departed from the state of grace, either in faith or in lifestyle.

Failure in faith is either in the knowledge of the doctrine of the gospel or in apprehending Christ.

Failure in knowledge involves declining into error, whether in a secondary or fundamental doctrine.

In this situation, the specific doctrine which counteracts their error should be expounded and taught. We need to stress its importance to them, along with the doctrine of repentance. But we must do this with a brotherly affection, as Paul says in Galatians 6:1 (cf. *2 Tim*. 2:25).

A fall from apprehending Christ leads to despair. In order to restore such we need to diagnose their condition and then prescribe the remedy. We must analyse either the cause of their temptation or of their condition. The diagnosis of the cause can be done appropriately by private confession (cf. *James* 5:17). But to prevent such confession being turned into an instrument of torture it must be governed by these principles:

(i) It ought to be done freely and not under any compulsion. Salvation does not depend on it.

(ii) It must not be a confession of all sins, but only of those which eat at the conscience and may lead to even greater spiritual danger if they are not dealt with.

(iii) Such confession should chiefly be made to pastors, but with the understanding that it may be confidentially shared with other reliable men in the church.

The diagnosis of a person's spiritual status involves investigating whether they are under the law or under grace. In order to clarify this we must probe and question to discover from them whether they are displeased with themselves, because they have displeased God. Do they hate sin as sin? That is the foundation of the repentance which brings

salvation. Then, secondly we must ask whether they have or feel in their heart a desire to be reconciled with God. This is the groundwork for a living faith.

When the diagnosis is complete, the remedy must be prescribed and applied from the gospel. It is twofold. Firstly, several gospel truths must be explained and frequently impressed upon them, including:

(i) That their sin is pardonable.

(ii) That the promises of grace are made generally to all who believe. They are not made to specific individuals; they therefore exclude no-one.

(iii) That the will to believe is itself faith (*Psa*. 145:19; Rev. 21:6).

(iv) That sin does not abolish grace but rather (since God turns everything to the good of those who are his) can lead to further illustrations of it.

(v) That in this fallen and sinful world all of God's works are done by means which are contrary to him!

Secondly, they must be encouraged, in the very bitterness of the temptation, to stir up the faith which has been lying idle - but covered over as it were. They must reassure themselves that their sins are forgiven. And they must be encouraged to struggle vigorously in prayer, either alone or with others, against carnal sense and human hope. They must be exhorted with great earnestness in order to enable them to do these things; even those who are unwilling must somehow be constrained to do them (see *Psalms* 77:1, 2; 130:1, 2; *Rom*. 4:18).

So that such remedies may do their work, the ministerial power of 'binding and loosing' is to be used in the form prescribed in the Scriptures (*2 Sam*. 12:13; *2 Cor*. 5:20). If by any chance melancholy troubles the individual's mind then a remedy for it must be sought in private.

Failure in life-style takes place when a Christian commits actual sin, as in the case of Noah's drunkenness, David's adultery, Peter's denial and similar examples. The strength and disposition of indwelling grace

may be lost for a time in terms of both the sense and the experience of the power of it. The law must be expounded along with the gospel to those who have thus fallen. Every new act of sin requires a new act of faith and repentance (*Isa*. 1:4, 16, 18).

7. Churches with both believers and unbelievers. This is the typical situation in our congregations. Any doctrine may be expounded to them, either from the law or from the gospel, so long as its biblical limitations and circumscriptions are observed (see *John* 7:37). This was what the prophets did in their sermons, when they announced judgment and destruction on the wicked, and promised deliverance in the Messiah to those who repented.

But what if someone in the congregation despairs,when the rest are hardened? What should be done? The answer is: those who are hardened must be made to hear the law circumscribed within the limits of the persons and the sins in view. But the afflicted conscience must be helped to hear the voice of the gospel applied especially to it.

VIII. VARIETIES OF APPLICATION

Application is of two kinds, mental and practical.

Mental Application

Mental application is concerned with the mind and involves either doctrine or reproof (*2 Tim*. 3:16, 17). When it involves doctrine, biblical teaching is used to inform the mind to enable it to come to a right judgment about what is to be believed. Reproof is using biblical teaching in order to recover the mind from error.

When false teaching is refuted during the exposition of Scripture the following cautions should be observed.

1. Make sure that you thoroughly understand the issue involved, or 'the state of the question' to be discussed.

2. Reprove only the errors which currently trouble the church. Leave

others alone if they lie dead in past history, or if they are not relevant to the people, unless you know that spiritual danger may still arise from them. This was the situation described in Revelation chapter two when the church at Pergamos was warned to beware of the Nicolaitans whose teaching had already influenced some of them.

3. If the error is not foundational to the gospel, the refutation should be done not only in a truly Christian fashion (as should always be the case) but also in a friendly manner. Gentle and brotherly disagreement is called for here.

Practical Application

Practical application has to do with life-style and behaviour and involves instruction and correction.

Instruction is the application of doctrine to enable us to live well in the context of the family, the state and the church. Itinvolves both encouragement and exhortation (*Rom*. 15:4).

Correction is the application of doctrine in a way that transforms lives marked by ungodliness and unrighteousness. This involves admonition. Such admonition must be done generally at first, without reference to specific circumstances. This principle is well-illustrated in 2 Samuel 12 where Nathan first made David aware of his sin by means of a general parable. Paul appears to have adopted a similar approach (see *Acts* 19:26, 35, 37).

If this kind of reproof does not bear fruit, it should be expressed in more detailed ways (see *1 Tim*. 5:20). But our expressions of hatred for sin must always be accompanied by an obvious love for the person who has sinned. Whenever possible the minister should include himself in his reproofs. In this way his preaching, teaching and counselling will be expressed in a mild and gentle spirit (cf. *Dan*. 4:16-19; *1 Cor*. 4:6; *Gal*. 2:15).

These different kinds of application can be employed with respect to every sentence of the Scripture. But it may be valuable to use an

example drawing on what Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520-75), the Lutheran, has written on Matthew 10:28 where Jesus urges the disciples not to fear those who can kill only the body, but rather to fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

It would be easy to elicit a wide variety of doctrines from this text, in relation to both our confession of faith and God's providence.

Doctrine

1. It is necessary for us to confess publicly the doctrine we know whenever the need arises.

2. We must make this confession even if it means risking the loss of our possessions and our lives.

3. We should despise the value of our lives by comparison with the value we place on Christ and his truth.

4. Eternal punishments which will be experienced both in soul and body are prepared for those who are not afraid to deny Christ and his truth.

5. God is intent and ready to rule and guide us, to enable us to make our confession aright.

6. The providence of God is not only general, but also particular, and includes the tiniest details, even the hairs of our head!

Reproof

1. It is a mistake to think it is adequate merely to embrace in the heart the faith and right views of religion. It is equally mistaken to imagine that it is within human power in the meantime to grant or affirm anything before men, such as the condition of the place, time and persons requires, especially when life seems to be in imminent danger of ending.

2. Epicureans are in error when they deny divine providence, thinking it beneath the majesty of God to take care of human affairs.

3. Stoics are in error when they imagine that all things are governed by fate (or by some irresistible and violent necessity).

4. Those who displace the wise ordination of the divine providence with chance and fortune are also mistaken.

5. Pelagians are in error in attributing more than is warranted to man's strength, as though it were in men's power to embrace the faith at their own pleasure or to continue steadfastly in it and fearlessly confess it to the end.

6. Others err when they depend more on outward things and unstable riches than on the power and goodness of God.

Instruction

1. You must, to the full extent of your power, strive to have a true fear of God in view, because you have now learned that the one God is to be feared above all men.

2. You must learn to despise human things to such an extent that you always desire, having forsaken them, to leave this world and be with Christ in heaven.

3. The consideration of God's special providence should teach you to think of the presence of God as all-seeing and all-knowing, to seek his help, and also to believe that you are helped in all things, and finally that there is no danger so terrible but he is able and willing to deliver you from it, when it is fit.

Correction

1. These words of Christ correct the negligence of those who do not pray for sincere love, so that inflamed with it they would not refuse to lay down their life for his name.

2. There is here, too, a criticism of the negligence of those who do not acknowledge or see the providence of God showing itself in all things.

3. There is reproof here for those who do not give God thanks for promising in his providence to govern and defend us in everything that concerns us.

4. Those who abuse God's good creation are rebuked here since it is clear that God takes care of all things. Any passage in Scripture can be handled in this way. Note, however, that we should not try to expound every doctrine on every occasion; but only those which can be applied appropriately to the present experiences and condition of the church. These must be carefully chosen, and limited to a few, lest those who hear God's Word expounded are overwhelmed by the sheer number of applications.

IX. THE USE OF THE MEMORY

Because it is customary to preach directly from the heart (or memory), something should be said here in connection with the use of the memory.

Artificial memory aids, like those which depend on remembering places and images can teach us how to commit sermons to memory easily, but they cannot be approved, for several reasons:

1. Memory aids which involve the stimulation of an image to trigger the memory involve us in an unspiritual activity. Such a method requires absurd, unworthy and, actually, monstrous thoughts. That is especially true of those which heighten and inflame the most corrupt affections of the flesh.

2. Artificial ways of remembering dull the mind and the memory. They require a threefold rather than a single memory: first remembering the places, then the images, and then thirdly what is actually to be said.

It is more helpful if when preparing for preaching we carefully imprint on our mind - with the help of an axiomatical, syllogistical, or methodical way of thinking - the various proofs and applications of the doctrines, the illustrations of the applications, and the order in which we plan to

expound them. There is no need to be overly anxious about the precise words we will use. As Horace says, words 'will not unwillingly follow the matter that is premeditated'.

The practice of memorising a sermon manuscript word for word has many disadvantages. For one thing, it involves an enormous amount of work. For another, if in our anxiety we lose the place then the congregation is in difficulties and our own mind ends up in a state of confusion. In addition, this practice hinders freedom of pronunciation, action and the Spirit-given flow of spiritual affections, because our minds are almost obsessed with whether our memory - which we have burdened with so much information - is going to fail us.

X. PREACHING THE WORD

We have discussed the preparation of the substance of the sermon. Now we must think about the actual preaching itself. Here two things are essential: (i) the hiding of human wisdom, and (ii) the demonstration or manifestation of the Spirit. Human wisdom must be concealed, both in the content of the sermon and in the language we use. The preaching of the Word is the testimony of God and the profession of the knowledge of Christ, not of human skill. Furthermore, the hearers ought not to ascribe their faith to the gifts of men, but to the power of God's Word (*1 Cor*. 2:1, 2, 5). But this does not mean that pulpits will be marked by a lack of knowledge and education. The minister may, and in fact *must*, privately make free use of the general arts and of philosophy as well as employ a wide variety of reading while he is preparing his sermon. But in public exposition these should be hidden from the congregation, not ostentatiously paraded before them. As the Latin proverb says, *Artis etiam celare artem* - it is also a point of art to conceal art.

The 'demonstration of the Spirit' (*1 Cor*. 2:4) becomes a reality when, in preaching, the minister of the Word conducts himself in such a way that everyone - even those who are ignorant of the gospel and are unbelievers - recognise that it is not so much the preacher who is speaking, but the Spirit of God in him and by him (*Mic*. 3:8; *1 Cor*. 2:4; 14:24, 25; 4:19, 20). This is what makes his ministry living and powerful

(*Luke* 11:27).

Such a 'demonstration' will come to expression either in speech or in gesture. The speech must be spiritual and gracious. Spiritual speech is speech which the Holy Spirit teaches (*1 Cor*. 2:13). It is both simple and clear, tailored to the understanding of the hearers and appropriate for expressing the majesty of the Spirit (*Acts* 17:2, 3; *2 Cor*. 4:2-4; *Gal*. 3:1). For this reason none of the specialised vocabulary of the arts, nor Greek and Latin phrases, nor odd turns of phrase should be used in the sermon. These distract the minds of those listeners who cannot see the connection between what has been said and what follows. In addition, unusual words hinder rather than help people in their efforts to understand what is being said. And they also tend to draw their minds away from the subject in hand to other things. In this connection, too, mere story-telling as well as vulgar or foolish statements must be avoided.

Gracious speech expresses the grace of the heart (*Luke* 4:22; *John* 7:46). Such grace is either of the person, or of the ministry.

The grace of the person is the holiness of the heart and of an unblameable life. While these do not in themselves qualify anyone to be a minister, no-one can do the work of the ministry without them, for several reasons.

1. Because the doctrine of the Word is hard to understand and to practise. Consequently the minister ought to express what he teaches by his example, as a kind of model or type of his own message (*Phil*. 4:8; *1 Tim*. 4:12; *1 Pet*. 5:3).

2. A person is not godly, however much he may understand the Scriptures, if he does not possess an inward sense and experience of the Word in his heart (*Gen*. 18:17-19; *Psa*. 25:8, 9; *Amos* 3:7).

3. God abhors godly speech which is not joined with a godly life (*Psa*. 50:16, 17). As Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329-c.389) said, it is as strange to see someone who is supposed to guide others on the way wandering out of the way himself, as it is to see a physician with signs of

disease in his own body.

4. It is one of the secrets of ministry that the minister ought to cover his infirmities, so that they are not obvious. Ordinary people do not distinguish between the ministry and the minister. They are not able to see the importance of the ministry without first assessing the person of the minister. Herod heard John Baptist willingly, not because he was a good minister, but because he was a good man (*Mark* 6:20). Gregory of Nazianzus strikes the right note again when he says: 'He that teaches sound doctrine, and lives wickedly, reaches with one hand what he knocks away with the other.' John Chrysostom (347-407), commenting on Matthew 20, says: 'The doctor of the church by teaching well and by living well instructs the people how they ought to live well; but by living ill he instructs God how to condemn him.' And again: 'It is an easy matter to show wisdom in words; teach me to live by your life, this is the best teaching.' Words do not make as great an impression on the soul as works do!

5. A minister who is wicked, either openly or secretly, is not worthy to stand before the face of the most holy and almighty God (*Lev*. 10:3; *Isa*. 6:6-8; *Jer*. 15:19). That is why the judgments of God remain for wicked ministers to tremble at (*1 Sam*. 2:17, 25).

Holiness

Holiness involves the following elements as far as the preacher is concerned:

1. A good conscience (*Acts* 24:16; *2 Cor*. 1:12; *1 Tim*. 1:19). Without this, the mouth of the preacher will be closed (*Isa*. 56:10).

2. An inward sense of the doctrine we are to preach. Wood that is capable of burning is not set alight unless fire is put to it. Similarly anyone who would encourage godly affections and desires in others must first have godly affections himself. Thus, whatever responses a particular sermon requires should first be stirred up privately in our own minds, so that we can kindle the same flame in our hearers.

3. The fear of God, so that, filled with a reverent sense of the majesty of God, we will speak soberly and with moderation.

4. A love for the people (*1 Thess*. 2:7). To encourage this affection, the minister must pray seriously and fervently for the people of God (*1 Sam*. 12:23).

5. The minister must also be worthy of respect for his constancy, integrity, seriousness and truthfulness. He must know how to respect others in private or in public, in keeping with the character of his congregation.

6. He must be temperate, inwardly restraining any strong feelings. Both his outward style of behaviour and his gestures ought to be moderate and straightforward. In this way he will be marked by dignity and authority. Consequently he must be neither covetous, nor a heavy drinker, nor litigious, nor a pugnacious character, nor given to bursts of anger. Those who are younger men must devote themselves to godliness, and reject the lusts of youth (*1 Tim*. 4:7).

Grace

The grace of the minister consists of the following qualities:

1. He must be able to teach (*1 Tim*. 3:2). Paul does not simply mean that it is highly desirable for this gift to be present; it is so essential that it may not be absent. This is the reason Gregory of Nazianzus refused a bishopric. Theophylact comments on this passage that 'this duty of teaching is above all others essential in those who are bishops.' Indeed, in the Councils of Nicea and Miletus, this was imposed instead of punishment, to hold the name of a minister, but not be allowed to preach the gospel.

2. Authority, by which the preacher speaks as the ambassador of the great Jehovah (*Titus* 2:15; *1 Pet*. 4:11).

3. Zeal, so that, in his longing for God's glory he will seek through his ministry to fulfil and effect the decree of God's election of men and

women to salvation (*Job* 32:18, 19; *Col*. 1:28, 29; *2 Tim*. 2:25).

Physical Gestures

Gesture involves the action of either the voice or the body.

The voice ought to be loud enough for all to hear (*Isa*. 58:1; *John* 7:37; *Acts* 2:14). In the exposition of the doctrine in a sermon we ought to be more moderate, but in the exhortation more fervent and vehement. There should be a gravity about the gestures of the body which will in their own way grace the messenger of God. It is appropriate therefore, that the preacher keep the trunk of his body erect and still, while the other parts like the arm, the hand, the face and eyes may express and (as it were) speak the spiritual affections of his heart.

Scripture provides illustrations of the communicative power of physical actions. The lifting up of the eye and the hand signifies confidence (*2 Chron*. 6:13, 14; *Acts* 7:55). The casting down of the eyes indicates sorrow and heaviness (*Luke* 18:13). As for gestures, we cannot lay down further principles; but here the example of widely respected godly ministers will serve as a guide.

XI. PUBLIC PRAYER

We have been considering the preaching of the Word. Now, finally, something should be said about leading in public prayer. This is the second aspect of prophesying. In it the minister is the voice of the people in calling upon God (*1 Sam*. 14:24; *Luke* 11:1).

In this connection we should note the following points:

1. The subject of public prayer should be, first, the deficiencies and sins of the people, and then the graces of God and the blessings they stand in need of (*1 Tim*. 2:1, 2). Tertullian says, 'We do all pray for all emperors, that they may obtain a long life, a quiet reign, a safe family, courageous armies, a faithful council, loyal subjects, a peaceable world, and whatsoever things are desired of a man and of Caesar.' Again, 'We

pray for emperors for their ministers and powers, for the state of the time, for the quietness of their affairs, and for the delaying of their death.' The Lord's Prayer covers these areas under six headings: God's glory, God's kingdom, and our obedience, the preservation of life, the forgiveness of sins, and the strengthening of the spirit.

2. The form of prayer should be as follows: One voice, that of the minister alone, should lead in prayer, the congregation joining in silently but indicating their agreement at the end by saying, 'Amen' (*Neh*. 8:6; *Acts* 4:24; *1 Cor*. 14:16). This was the practice in the early church, as Justin says: 'When the president has finished his prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present cry out with a favourable approbation, saying, Amen.'

3. But the one voice which expresses the corporate prayers of the congregation needs to be understood (*1 Cor*. 14:15). It should not lead in prayer in a jagged and abrupt fashion, but with a steady flow of petitions, so that empty repetitions are avoided (*Matt*. 6:7).

4. There are three elements in praying: (i) Carefully thinking about the appropriate content for prayer; (ii) Setting the themes in an appropriate order; (iii) Expressing the prayer so that it is made in public in a way that is edifying for the congregation.

To the Triune God be the glory!

SUMMARY

Preaching involves:

1. Reading the text clearly from the canonical Scriptures.

2. Explaining the meaning of it, once it has been read, in the light of the Scriptures themselves.

3. Gathering a few profitable points of doctrine from the natural sense of the passage.

4. If the preacher is suitably gifted, applying the doctrines thus explained to the life and practice of the congregation in straightforward, plain speech.

The heart of the matter is this:

Preach one Christ,
by Christ,
to the praise of Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria
To God alone be the glory!
