

The Value of Simplicity in Preaching

A Discussion of JC Ryle's *Simplicity in Preaching*

Dr. Micheal S. Pardue, Sr.

Notes

Ryle's four prefatory remarks

- 1) to attain simplicity in preaching is of the utmost importance to every minister who wishes to be useful to souls.
- 2) to attain simplicity in preaching is by no means an easy matter
- 3) I would not have my readers suppose I mean childish preaching
- 4) it is not coarse or vulgar preaching that is needed

Ryle's five brief hints

1. If you want to attain simplicity in preaching, you must have a clear knowledge of what you are going to preach.

- a. Ask questions of the text; who, what, when, where, why.
- b. Use good resources to develop that knowledge. Use resources that challenge you. Use ones that do not line up with your beliefs. This helps you to fully understand the passage you are preaching. Use both rigorous academic resources and more popular level works.
- c. Ask, where does this text fit into the biblical storyline. Texts have context. They are dangerous outside of that context.
 - i. Philippians 4:13
 - ii. Matthew 7:1
- d. "do not be ashamed of dividing your sermons and stating your divisions"

2. If you would attain simplicity in preaching, you must use simple words.

- a. In general, your audience cannot absorb every single thing you have learned in your preparation.
- b. Do not bombard them with big theological words. Make sure to balance the opportunities to teach your listeners theological terms with the need to ensure they understand what you are teaching.
 - i. Examples: Eschatology – end times; soteriology – doctrine of salvation; sanctification – spiritual growth

3. If you would attain simplicity in preaching, you must seek to acquire a simple style of composition, with short sentences and as few colons and semicolons as possible.

- a. There is no reason to have long, complicated sentences in a sermon that is going to be communicated orally.
- b. If you preach from an outline, you must be conscience of your sentences as you speak. Do not allow them to continue without clear ends.
- c. Use your pauses to allow thoughts to settle into the minds of your listeners.
- d. If you use a manuscript, be familiar with it. Ensure you have read it allowed before preaching to ensure there are natural breaks and that sentences are not overly complicated.

4. If you would attain simplicity in preaching, aim at directness.

- a. “Never say ‘we’ when you mean ‘I.’”
Do not be afraid to say to your audience “you.”
- b. Tell people what you mean. Don’t beat around the bush. Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, tell them what you told them. Make the point of the message clear and make your application clear. What do you desire for them to do with this message. It might not always be an action; it may be an inner change. However, be clear about what it is that should be the result of them hearing the Word of God.

5. If you would attain simplicity in preaching, make abundant use of illustration and anecdote.

- a. “You must regard illustrations as windows through which light is let in upon your subject”
- b. “There is a proper way of telling stories. If a man cannot tell stories naturally—he had better not tell them at all. Illustration, again, after all I have said in its favor, may be carried too far.”
- c. Don’t be the hero of every story, or any stories for that matter. Jesus is always the hero, not the preacher.
- d. Don’t tell stories to draw attention to yourself. Don’t draw attention to your family too often or throw your family under the bus, especially if you know it makes them uncomfortable.

- e. Do not use illustrations that will be unfamiliar to too many people, require too much explanation, or do not further the point of the message. We might call this chasing rabbits. Leave the rabbit hunting for another day.

You will never attain simplicity in preaching without plenty of work—pains and trouble... I am persuaded that, in preaching, little can be done except by trouble and by pains... All the simplicity in the world can do no good, unless you preach the simple gospel of Jesus Christ so fully and clearly that everybody can understand it. If 'Christ crucified' has not His rightful place in your sermons, and 'sin' is not exposed as it should be, and your people are not plainly told what they ought to believe, and be, and do—your preaching is of no use!.. Above all, let us never forget that all the simplicity in the world is useless without prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the grant of God's blessing, and a life corresponding in some measure to what we preach. Be it ours to have an earnest desire for the souls of men, while we seek for simplicity in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and let us never forget to accompany our sermons by holy living and fervent prayer! – J.C. Ryle

The Value of Simplicity in Preaching

	What must I do in my preparation to...	What must I do in my sermon composition to...	What must I do in my sermon delivery to...	What one improvement I can make in my next sermon to...
Have a clear knowledge of what you are going to preach.				
Use simple words.				
Seek to acquire a simple style of composition.				
Aim at directness.				
Make abundant use of illustration and anecdote.				

