

Communicate the Gospel More Effectively

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What would you say is the greatest danger facing the Christian Church today? Is it godless Communism, which threatens not only to overthrow our political structures but to rob us of our religious freedom as well? Some of you may very well feel that the greatest danger facing our church is that one teaching of the Scripture after another will be lost, so that eventually there will be precious little left to believe.

Now, to be sure, these are dangers, and very real ones, with which you and I will have to contend in our ministry. But I submit they're not necessarily the greatest danger. As I see it, the greatest danger facing the Christian Church today are not the liberal preachers who rip Christianity to shreds. Just as bad are conservative preachers whose sermons are dull, boring, totally unrelated to the life people live seven days a week. Dorothy Sayers has remarked: "The church today has succeeded in doing what the apostles and even the enemies of Christ never succeeded in doing: it has made him appear dull."

The topic assigned for this essay speaks directly to this point, for it is an admonition directed at each of us:

Communicate the Gospel More Effectively!

This essay will seek to demonstrate that if we are to respond to this admonition we will strive in our pulpit work

- I. To choose language which clearly conveys God's charter for his people; and
- II. To use methods designed to provide a favorable reception for God's message.

I

Do you remember a remark your Greek instructor made when you began your study of New Testament Greek after years of studying Xenophon and Homer and Thucydides? He pointed out that the new Testament was written not in the majestic and beautiful Greek of the classical period, but in the Greek of the marketplace and the port. Surely the Holy Spirit is teaching us something here. If we are to give our people the Gospel in their language, then we're going to have to learn the *Koine* of today's world and to preach in language which clearly conveys God's charter for his people, a charter which announces first of all: "I have called you to be mine!"

One of the dark marks of our day is its doubt, its uncertainty about so many important things, especially about the answers to some crucially important questions, questions like: "Who am I, and where did I come from?" "What am I doing on earth?" "What's the purpose of my life?" "Where am I going, and how can I be sure I'll get where I hope I'm going to get?" Nobody can be considered intelligent who doesn't know the answers to those basic questions. But where does one get his answers? Right here is where effective communication of the gospel begins. Right here is the first fact we'd want to nail down tight when talking to people, especially the non-church member, who's used to discussing religion in terms of "The way I look at it..." or "Well, it seems to me..." In order to communicate the gospel effectively to people, we'll have to *make sure they understand clearly that what we're presenting is revealed* (re + velare) *religion*, a message which no man could ever have discovered by himself, but concerning which God spoke to us miraculously. To people who are accustomed to think that this world pretty well runs itself according to well-established laws of nature, we daren't ever grow tired of proclaiming that God has often intervened in our world—to cause things to

happen which otherwise would never have happened, to tell us things which we would otherwise not have known.

When we describe the action God took in order to make us members of his family, there's a temptation for preachers to be lazy, to fall back into old and comfortable language patterns, instead of exerting ourselves to find different and interesting ways of communicating the gospel to God's children living in these closing years of the twentieth century. To communicate the gospel effectively, we shall have to *make sure our pulpit language is understood by our hearers*.

We're going to have to learn, first of all, not to use difficult or ambiguous words and phrases without explaining them. Take the word "salvation." I submit it doesn't communicate truth too well to our people, chiefly because it's ambiguous. "Salvation" means "deliverance," but deliverance from what? Are you satisfied when you ask a confirmand or a Sunday-school pupil: "What did Jesus do for you?" and he responds: "Jesus saved me from sin"? That answer is imprecise; it doesn't say accurately enough what needs to be said. When your sermon announces: "Jesus saved you from sin," perhaps you mean that Jesus canceled our *debt* of sin, so that the guilt of our sin no longer rests on us but on Christ. Or perhaps you mean that Jesus broke the *power* of sin in us, so that, as Paul reminded the Romans: "Sin shall not have dominion over you" (6:14). That's salvation, too. Or when you announce: "Jesus gained salvation for you," perhaps you're referring to the day when we shall be delivered from the very *presence* of sin. In that case, you're using the word "salvation" in its eschatological sense. But how are your hearers supposed to know which particular meaning you're attaching to the word unless you make that clear? If we want to convey God's truth to our generation, be assured we can do this only in language which speaks clearly—not only clearly enough to be understood, but so clearly that we cannot be misunderstood. For the preacher to disregard this, and instead to follow the principle that if you throw enough mud at a wall some of it has got to stick, is unbecoming to an ambassador of the Most High.

Your essayist realizes that it's a bit frustrating in every sermon to have to explain the important concepts on which Christian faith rests, and the important connections between doctrines. Preachers, being human, are tempted to take the easy way out. One of the most appealing shortcuts in sermonizing is to bypass the difficult and time-consuming job of explaining the abstract idea. Instead of explaining the particular aspect of God's rescue operation which the sermon text pictures, why not just refer to it as "salvation" and save a paragraph? Why not just refer to "the flesh" and assume that every hearer with one or two brain cells functioning knows that "flesh" is the heathen within us?

It's the essayist's conviction that oftener than we think our message is unclear to the people whom we want to reach. "The things of this world"—what's that supposed to mean to Joe or Jane Christian? "The kingdom of God" is an expression that can mean several different things in the Scripture. What concrete idea does it present to the Christian who hears his pastor throw out the expression in a sermon without explanation? If I shoot over the heads of my hearers, this does not prove I have superior ammunition. It proves only that I'm a poor shot. C.S. Lewis has said: "Any fool can write learned language; the vernacular is the real test. If you can't turn your faith into it, either you don't understand it, or you don't believe it." Avoiding difficult and ambiguous words and phrases, as well as obsolete language patterns, is absolutely indispensable for communicating the gospel effectively.

Preachers often fail to communicate law and gospel effectively because they make the mistake of not going deep enough. When analyzing human problems they take the surface situation—e.g., a man doesn't love his wife. They analyze it and end by saying in effect: "You love yourself too much," or "You are a proud and lustful man." That's not probing deeply enough into the man's basic malady. The question remains unanswered: "Why is he proud and lustful? What is it that drives him to view everything in terms of himself?" The answer, of course, is rooted in the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods." The man's heart is in rebellion against God; he is separating himself from God. His failure to love his wife is rooted in his failure to love God, which in turn is rooted in his separation from God. If the human problem in a sermon is not analyzed deeply enough, the preacher will make the law and not the gospel the key to solving the problem. That's like putting a band-aid on skin cancer.

What are the needs which we will address in our sermons, needs in which people are calling for help? As you answer that question (and you have to answer it each week) beware of being too general and saying: “*Sin* is the big need to which I preach, and *the devil* is another.” To communicate God’s revealed Word effectively we will have to be more specific in pinpointing the need to which the sermon will address itself. A homiletics instructor of mine 35 years ago used to speak of the malady from which the sermon is to free the hearer. To speak to human need, and to emphasize the remedy you’re offering, contrast it with the corresponding malady. The printed outline you have in your hands lists a representative number of these maladies; the list is not intended to be exhaustive.

Here is a very basic step in constructing a sermon. The persuasion you hope to accomplish with your sermon depends on the hearer’s awareness of what he’s being freed from and on his desire for that freeing. When we analyze our sermon writing procedures, how easy it is to overlook this basic fact, to content ourselves with spotting a few symptoms of ungodliness, and then building the sermon around them. Now spotting the symptoms can be helpful, but we dare not content ourselves with treating symptoms. That’s the easy pitfall of preaching against S-I-N-S instead of against S-I-N. Mention the symptoms, of course (lovelessness, drinking to excess, worrying, surrendering to dirty sex), but only as evidence of a deeper malady from which your sermon wants to free the hearer.

The basic malady which afflicts every one of our hearers, and their pastor as well, is that man designed for God is *separated from God*—by nature, and often by choice. Our first parents refused to be responsible to God, and we are their children in more ways than one. We’re smart enough to know that if a fish was designed by God to live in water, then it can’t be happy on our living room carpet, but each day of our lives we try to live out of our element. Isaiah was describing the basic malady not only of the eighth century B.C. but also of the twentieth century A.D. when he confessed: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way,” and again, that this has “separated you from your God.”

What’s the specific *remedy* which God has supplied for this malady? To counter our basic problem of separation from God, the Scripture offers us the wonderful assurance: “Through our Lord Jesus we have now received the *atonement*,” the repairing of the breach, the restoring of that shattered relationship.

Related to the basic malady of the sinner’s separation from God is a second one: *enmity against God*. Have we helped our hearers to make this diagnosis of their own spiritual condition? God designed us to live under him as his children, and we insist on living alongside him as equals, claiming the right to disagree with him in making decisions and in establishing life’s priorities. God’s remedy for this particular malady is that we who were born enemies of God have been *reconciled* to God.

A related malady enters our life when God must reaffirm his unwillingness to let his creatures play God. “Let no one deceive you with empty words,” Paul once wrote to the Ephesians, “because of such things God’s *wrath* comes on those who are disobedient.” After we have paid special attention to that malady, Paul’s assurance to his readers at Rome seems all the more beautiful to us: “Since we have been justified through faith, we have *peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Before his first children took that fateful step away from him in Paradise, God pointed out what the consequences would be: “When you eat of it you will surely *die*.” Here is a drastic metaphor God uses to describe the condition of the person who breaks off the relationship between the Creator and the creature. According to God, that person is a walking corpse. And if his condition is not reversed by a miracle of the Holy Spirit, it will become irreversible. The remedy God in grace has provided to this malady of death is *life*. Grace, we know, is not just getting something we have not deserved; it’s getting the very opposite of what we deserve—in this case, life for death.

We often say in sermons that the basic malady is sin. The statement is, of course, true. But I don’t think the statement is as helpful or as meaningful to people as we like to imagine it is. The reason is that the word “sin” can have several quite different meanings in the Scripture. It may refer to the sinner’s *act of rebellion* “breaking faith” with God. How important that we share this picture with people who are regularly exposed to an ethic which says: “You are your own boss. What you do with your life, your body, your money, is your own

business.” But we who were rebels now have the *testimony of the Spirit* within us, leading us to say with David: “To do your will, O my God, is my desire.”

The word “sin” can refer in the Scripture not only to the act of rebellion, but to the consequences as well. Sin is often pictured as a debt, a load of *guilt*, which must be removed if the sinner is ever to live in God’s presence. To sinners burdened with a load of guilt we can bring the Savior’s wondrous invitation: “Here, let me take that load of guilt; let me carry it.” The gospel remedy for guilt is the assurance of *forgiveness*.

The word “sin” may connote still a third malady. In Romans 7, e.g., sin is presented as an active *evil power* in the heart and life of every Christian. Paul speaks of not doing what he wants to do, and of doing what he hates. Then he draws the conclusion: “If I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.” It’s only when the sinner realizes this malady that he can appreciate the remedy God has supplied—a remedy about which many preachers are strangely silent. God announces that sin’s evil dominion has been broken in us. Instead of being a slave all my life to an evil power that is active within me, I have in the gospel *release from sin’s power*. The chains that bound me in slavery to Satan are broken; I have been set free to serve God, to seek his glory in everything.

One of the most frightening statistics I’ve heard in a long time was a statistic announced by Dr. George Gallup. According to him, 51% of Americans think that life is basically boring. What malady do you see reflected here? Isn’t it the *meaninglessness of life* without God at its center? Solomon emphasized this several dozen times in the book of Ecclesiastes. Even if we don’t agree with Gallup’s percentages, each of us knows that many members of our congregations are not appreciating life as they ought to and as they would like to. If we were to ask these people: “Well, how are things going?” they’d probably smile and answer: “Fine!” But deep down they might very well be thinking: “There’s got to be more to life than I have found!” To such people God offers a valid goal, a *satisfying goal* which will enrich all of life, and that is: “Everything to the glory of God!”

The point of this lengthy elaboration of some of the maladies to which our sermons must address themselves is that a sermon may be doctrinally correct and still not touch the hearts of our hearers if they feel it’s isolated from what they feel are the actual realities of their lives. When Christ preached, he met people on their level.

Do you see another advantage to a sermon’s being specific in identifying the malady and the remedy? Basically, a preacher has the same message to present Sunday after Sunday, year after year. If his preaching is not to become monotonous and repetitious, if his proclamation is to remain fresh and vigorous over a period of years, he will do well to copy the Scripture’s many-splendored presentation of the rescue and release Christ brings us. Our skill at doing this will help to measure the effectiveness of our gospel preaching.

When you describe Christ’s redemptive work, are you satisfied with saying that “He died for our sins”? Is that giving people a sufficiently clear picture of Christ’s vicarious work? Where is his *active* obedience? His death occupied only a few hours on that Friday we call Good, but the life of perfect obedience he lived for us lasted for more than 30 years. At Mt. Sinai God not only forbade disobedience; he also demanded obedience. Surely it’s important for us to declare that Jesus, with his innocent death, covered our disobedience. But isn’t it equally important to emphasize that Jesus, by his life of perfect obedience, provided the obedience which God had demanded of us but we had not provided?

Once the preacher has explained the amazing acts of God which brought us rebels back to the heart of the heavenly Father, the preacher is at another critical point. He dare not stop there. For Christ, saving people meant not only rescuing them but also restoring them. God’s charter for us speaks, first of all, of *deliverance*, but deliverance always leads to *discipleship*. This, then, is the goal of our ministry, the goal of every sermon: to further God’s saving purpose in the lives of those who hear, enlisting and equipping them in turn to be agents of God’s cosmic rescue operation. In his Word God announces to us not only: “I have called you to be mine!” but also: “I have called you to be different!”

This is important for effective gospel proclamation: to say as clearly as we know how that God has called us not only to be nice, quiet, sincere people, but to be priests of God, his chosen representatives in that particular slice of life where he has placed us. God holds us accountable for helping people to realize that they

have been set free from the power of sin and Satan not so that they might be their own boss, but so that they might every day in some way help God in his creative work of governing the universe, as well as in his redemptive work of leading souls to his side. By calling every Christian his priest, God is emphasizing that every Christian has been placed in this world to bring the needs and frustrations of the world before God, and in order to transmit God's judgment, promise and blessing to the world.

God has called you and me into this business of being preachers for the sake of his people. We exist for their sake, not they for ours. How easy it is to acquire the unholy habit of looking upon the lay members of our congregation as the pastor's little helpers, who are to assist him to carry out his ministry. But what a perversion of the truth! It's we pastors who have been called to serve people, to help God's priests carry out their ministry. The pastor who wants to communicate the gospel effectively dare never forget that the decisive battles of faith are not fought within the four walls of a church building, but in the social, political, economic and cultural areas where our parishioners spend most of their waking hours.

The preacher who wants to communicate the gospel effectively will strive to make his pulpit language and his prayer language sprightly and spirited, instead of ponderous and solemn. Have you ever come across this? God gives a pastor a naturally sunny disposition and a delightful sense of humor, but the man lets it come out only at a party or a wedding celebration; in the pulpit he's all sober and somber. He may even cause people to say: "Too bad he became a preacher; after all, he has such a good sense of humor." If by nature you're a cheerful person, but there isn't a spark of cheerfulness in your preaching, it's a signal to the congregation that in an essential part of your temperament you're not affected by what you're saying. Luther was a master at injecting just a twinkle, just a sparkle of pleasant wit or of human interest in what he said and wrote. A couple examples come to mind. On one occasion he was explaining how necessary it is to drown the Old Adam. But Luther added: "It's difficult to drown the Old Adam, because that rascal can swim." Undignified? Unbecoming to the gospel of Christ? I'd prefer to call that very effective communication of the gospel. Or how about this statement of Luther? "Faith dare not simply lie on the heart, like foam on beer." Spurgeon once said: "If you preach the truth in a dull, monotonous style, God may bless it, but in all likelihood he won't."

II

The preacher dare never forget that he is standing in the place of God. His hands are the Good Shepherd's hands reaching out for the lost sheep; his voice is the Savior's voice; his heart beats with the Savior's love. Whatever particular job the undershepherd happens to be doing, he is acting in God's stead. The pastor's ministry, in all its particulars, simply must give evidence of his love for the flock. If he approaches people with a condescending attitude, people will sense that and resent it. If the preacher thinks he's cute, his sermon will show that. A too professional attitude will also betray itself to your hearers. Every sermon you preach, every prayer you pray, every visit you make and class you conduct must announce: "Lord, I love *you*, and I love these people!" But—honestly, now—listen to some preachers grind out their doctrines, and don't you sometimes wonder whether they've ever been in love, or ever had their heart broken, or ever lost a friend? Which brings us to the second part of this essay: *Communicating the gospel effectively means using methods designed to provide a favorable reception for God's message.*

Communicating the gospel effectively means not only making the gospel *clear* to people; it also means making it *attractive* to people. Your essayist realizes that these last words can be misunderstood. In an attempt to make God's Word more attractive, many have remodeled God's Word—chipping away at the demands and threats of the law, altering the promises of the gospel, perhaps by adding a condition to it. But this does not for a moment change the fact that you and I have been called into the business of the Christian ministry to win friends for Jesus Christ, to use whatever honorable methods we can think of to provide a favorable reception for God's message. What are some of these?

In whatever he does, but especially in his public preaching, the preacher must *radiate joy*. His voice and his appearance must underscore the fact that Christ has come to bring joy to the world. One wonders how well we have communicated our joy in Christ when an observer as perceptive as Thomas Carlyle defines Christianity

as “a creed of sorrow.” Or how about Nietzsche’s evaluation of Christians? “I would believe in their salvation if they looked a little more like people who have been saved.” When one hears things like that, one ought to ask himself: “Have I given the impression that worshipping God is a solemn and dull business?” Each Sunday morning we sing: “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,” but do we sing those words with a frown on our foreheads? A religion that appears to have given you a headache can hardly be expected to cure the ills of the world. Don’t forget how your faith looks to that stranger in your service, to that family who’s just moved into your neighborhood and on whom you’ll be calling tomorrow evening. What appeals to the outsider is probably not your sensitized conscience or even your orthodox sermon, but more likely your joy in Christ, the obvious evidence that Jesus Christ has put a song in your heart. Itzhak Periman, world-famous Israeli violinist, has stated: “People only half listen when you play. The other half is watching.”

I have never served a mission congregation as pastor and consequently have never received those loving reminders from North Avenue about your congregation’s financial goals for the new year, about the annual head count of members and prospects, and estimates of the numbers of new members who will enter your congregation in each of the next ten years. I speak only from personal experience as pastor of self-supporting congregations when I say that it is distinctly possible for a minister to be more interested in his congregation than in the Lord, and to promote the congregation at the expense of the Lord’s best interests. When that temptation comes to you, remember that communicating the gospel effectively means being interested in people for *their* sake, and not for the *congregation’s* sake. When you attempt, perhaps in the concluding paragraphs of your sermons, to lead people to make a particular decision, show that your interest in them is personally, not institutionally motivated. Your job is to see to it that the Holy Spirit has all the elbow room he needs to move that person in God’s direction.

Say you’re calling on a new family. You hope they’ll join your congregation. But why? Do you say: “We’re a young congregation, a small group; we could certainly use members like you. The big congregation down the street has plenty of members, but we don’t”? Wouldn’t God’s cause be better served if the conversation ran something like this:

“We’re delighted that you worshiped with us yesterday. We consider it a privilege to share God’s Word with people; that’s what we’re in the business for.”

“Well, thank you, pastor. Actually we haven’t as yet decided which church we’re going to join.”

“Right; that’s your decision, and I wouldn’t want to interfere. I do want to promise you, though, that the Word preached in our church is something you need just as badly as I do. If you should decide to make our congregation your church home, our one big aim would be to help you find God’s help, to fulfill that purpose which God had in mind when he put you on this earth.”

The same thing applies with equal cogency to our attitude toward those people who are already our members. Each of us knows the temptation to regard members as *supporters of a congregation*, instead of as *sons and daughters in the King’s family*. If the fruit you had looked for in some area of congregational life is not there (perhaps in the area of finances), the pastor’s concern is not so much that the congregation needs that fruit, but rather that the branch isn’t healthy.

Just a sidelight here.... This interest of the pastor in the welfare of the souls of his flock will be evident in the pastor’s pulpit behavior. When you want to share good news with someone, remember that the name of the game is *two eyes to two eyes*. All of us know from experience how frustrating it is to carry on a conversation with someone whose attention is elsewhere and whose eyes are constantly flitting away from the person with whom he’s speaking. Apply that to the sermon. How can I have decent eye contact with the people God has called me to help if I’m consulting a sermon manuscript in my pulpit Bible? The pastor who uses a manuscript in the pulpit might well give thought to what impression he is giving his flock. Is the most important thing to him that he get through that sermon without becoming unglued, or is the important thing that those people know he’s out to serve their deepest needs? And let this be added: “The pastor who habitually consults his manuscript in the pulpit doesn’t have his greatest problems in the pulpit. When writing his sermon he doesn’t have to fight

for the most simple and direct expression or for the most closely knit sequence of particulars. The result is an address which he could never repeat except by reading—and one which the audience could never remember except by rereading” (Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church*, 127). Communicating the gospel effectively means preaching from the heart to the heart without intermediary.

Let me add parenthetically: everything that was just said about the importance of eye contact during the sermon applies equally to conducting the liturgy. There’s an antiphonal, a back-and-forth character to our forms of worship; it’s a type of elevated conversation; but that character of the worship service is obscured when the liturgist’s head is buried in a book. Surely it ought to be the long-range goal of every pastor to strive to be independent of the book when conducting the liturgy, especially those parts which call for him to face the congregation.

It’s pretty obvious that if you’re going to communicate the gospel effectively you yourself must be impressed with that message. If that message causes you embarrassment, you’ll show it, and the results on the person you’re addressing will not be impressive. To communicate the gospel effectively, therefore, *be positive, not apologetic*. Avoid that bashful brand of Christianity which hesitantly tiptoes up to the newcomer, hat in hand, and almost reluctantly suggests: “I hope I’m not bothering you, but if you don’t mind, I’d like to say a few unobjectionable words about the Lord of heaven and earth.” The TV huckster trying to sell you his brand of underarm deodorant or of toothpaste is positive in his presentation of the merits of his product. Dare we be less than positive in presenting the message which has brought meaning into our lives and hope into our future? The Lord of the Church has not called us to be lawyers to argue his case, but witnesses. The people you talk to don’t want your argument, but they need your witness. “Does this Christianity thing work?” they’re asking. “Then share it with the rest of us!” You don’t have to argue the gospel, because the gospel proves itself, and is its own best evidence. God’s Word, as Luther used to say, has hands and feet. It runs after a man; it grips him. Let it loose, and things will happen. But many are so busy defending the gospel and contending for it that they forget to preach robust good news.

And while we’re on the subject of things that hinder effective gospel proclamation, let me mention another. Don’t make membership in your congregation seem too easy. You won’t make Jesus Christ one bit more appealing to people by demeaning or underestimating his claim. Let no one ever hear you saying: “It won’t cost you much to be a Christian.” That is simply not true. It will cost you everything you have and are to be a Christian. It doesn’t cost a girl much to *become* a wife; the right two words will do it. But it will cost that girl a whole lifetime to *be* a good wife. It’s true enough that it cost you nothing to become a Christian; that God did for you, without any cooperation from you. But Jesus’ words make it clear that it will cost you your very self to be a Christian: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself...” Don’t underestimate that claim. Let’s face it: Christianity is no tame little tea party, but an unrelenting struggle against the forces of evil for the souls of men.

The preacher who wants to communicate the gospel of a risen and living Lord effectively will conduct his ministry expectantly. There dare be no defeatism about our message, because we serve a living Lord, a Lord who defeated the old evil foe and who has promised us: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against my church.” Coming in contact with that powerful gospel message is in a sense like taking hold of a live wire. In the words of the Scripture there is an abundant supply of power, power to free a man from the guilt of unforgiven sin, power to cut a man loose from slavery to Satan, power to strengthen a man to live the new life which God has called him to live. When you sit down to write your next sermon, and when you step into your pulpit to preach it, believe with all your heart that God’s power is waiting to be released. Every time you enter your pulpit ask yourself: “Do I actually believe that God will use me and my sermon in this very hour to convict men and women, and to turn their faces toward Christ and toward heaven?” This is preaching with expectancy, and if I can’t preach with such confidence, then I’d best stay out of a pulpit.

Every time you deliver a sermon you’re speaking two languages simultaneously. One is the language of the mind; that’s the language written out on the pages of your sermon manuscript. But there’s a second language you speak from the pulpit, and that’s the language of the speaker’s feelings, his innermost emotions.

A recent paperback offered this perceptive comment:

These simultaneous communications need not say the same thing. In fact, they may and often do say exactly opposite things, in which case the message of the words is not merely diminished by the contrary message of the feelings; it is actually canceled. (Stevenson and Diehl, *Reaching People from the Pulpit*, 73)

And so the rule for effective gospel communication must be: in order not to mislead or confuse your hearers, *be sure that in your sermon the language of the feelings supports the language of the mind*. We sometimes act as though we think that in the pulpit we speak only with our mouth. But that is simply not so. Whenever we step into a pulpit, our bodies go along to play their own pantomimes, to tell their own stories, whether we like it or not. And this is not bad, except when our bodies speak one thing and our words the exact opposite.

Actually, as Stevenson and Diehl point out, there are three possible relationships of a speaker's body to his delivery of a speech.

1. His body may go into the pulpit with him like a passive, inert passenger merely going along for the ride. The speaker speaks as if he were nothing but head; nothing below his neck has any share in what he is doing. If there were any way to arrange it, his body could just as well be playing golf or going fishing.
2. A speaker's body may accompany him like a mischievous boy bent upon distracting attention. There is bodily agitation, but it does not support or strengthen what is being said. Index finger keeps repeating the same meaningless gesture, or the speaker teeters nervously from heel to toe and keeps bouncing up and down.
3. A speaker's body may bring to his speech the whole weight and total force of personality. The sermon is then not only a *talk* about religion; it's a live *demonstration* of it. Members of the body are then instruments of the speaker's thoughts just as his words are. The lifted eyebrow, the shrugging shoulders, the slight stoop or erect posture, the clenched fist, the pointed finger, the smile, the frown—all reinforce the message coming out of the speaker's mouth. Here, surely, is an important component of effective gospel communication.

In analyzing speakers, two opposite types may be found, each as remarkable as the other. There are those who exhibit the sheer genius of being able to take something simple and to twist it into something dark and obscure. I remember reading about a pastor who at a pastoral conference was called upon to thank the ladies for having served lunch, and who responded by expressing appreciation to them for “socializing our intellectual intercourse.” There are preachers like that who can take the simple and twist it into the obscure. But there are also those—and may their tribe increase!—who either possess, or more likely have developed, the skill to take something profound and present it with simplicity, a simplicity which glorifies God and edifies people. This is communicating the gospel effectively. Go, and do likewise!