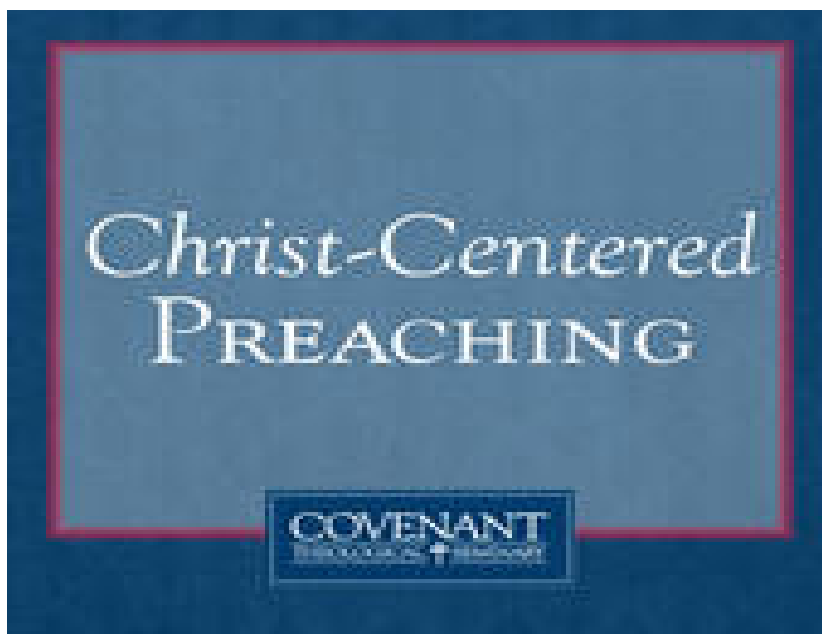


# Christ Centered Preaching: Preparation and Delivery of Sermons

## LECTURE 1 - 28 Transcripts



## **Word and Witness**

*Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have given us Your Word, that which is life and bread to Your people. You make Your Spirit shine upon it so that it is reflected into our hearts and our hearts made able to receive what you say. But not our hearts only, rather as we ingest all the goodness of what You have given, You make us also reflectors of Your truth to others. We would be those who shine well. Help us therefore by what we learn in this class, by what we do, to be those who are well equipped for shining in the darkness, for the sake of those whom You love and are calling to Yourself. We ask not on the basis of our ability but rather the ability that is made available by Your Spirit. We lean on You now and ask for Your help and aid, because apart from You, we can do nothing. Grant us therefore Your Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The goal for this lesson is to understand how important preaching is, and then what is really important in preaching. What is really important in preaching may surprise you as we move forward.

If I were to ask why you are taking this course, why you would go to seminary, I hope you would have some sense of gaining the knowledge and the skills for what God calls you to do. It is both sides of that, gaining the knowledge and the skills for what God is calling you to do, that is important. I think you would recognize that if you were here just to gain knowledge, the Scriptures themselves tell us the consequence of that: “knowledge puffs up.” That is all it does if there is not some release, some mechanism by which God enables us to share that knowledge. It will not ultimately benefit us—it is actually harmful to us unless there is some way in which it is being used for God’s purposes. The idea is that God is saying, “What I desire from you is not simply your knowledge of the Word but your ability to communicate it to others.” I mentioned this in our school’s convocation the other day: when the apostles prayed for others, they said, “We want you to know everything that we know, that you may know how wide and deep is the love of Christ Jesus.” But in order for that to be true, you have to be active in sharing your faith. This is an amazing concept. For us to really know what God is saying, we have to be actively involved in communicating it to others. Therefore, Dr. Rayburn, who taught this course for 25 years and was the founding president of Covenant Seminary, would always remind us in his first lecture, “Now there is only one king of your studies, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. But homiletics is the queen.” He was reminding us that everything we do in the curriculum—whether it is New Testament studies, Old Testament studies, systematic theology, or church history—is feeding a purpose. That purpose is to equip us to feed others, because this is really the means by which we ourselves will know and grow fully in the understanding of the grace of God that He intends for us. Thus preaching is, in a sense, elevated to the highest position. That sounds nice, until you consider the responsibility this puts on you. Once you elevate the task so high, once you say that this is the main thing to be done, then people who are about to do it feel very inadequate. When you elevate the task, you make the servant very lacking in confidence.

What I want to do now is to help you stop thinking that the responsibility for the effects of preaching all rests on you, that it is something you have to do well enough that it will have an effect. I want you to recognize this is its essence: the power is not in you, and it never will be. The power is in the Word. It is not how well you do the task that ultimately is the issue. It is how well you communicate the Word, which carries the power of God. We sometimes think of the greatest nineteenth-century Reformed preacher as being Charles H. Spurgeon. I want you to think of what he said about himself. He said, “I have often been surprised at the mercy of God to me. Poor sermons of mine that I could cry over when I get home have nonetheless led scores to the cause. And more wonderful still, words that I speak in ordinary conversation, mere chance sentences as men call them, have nevertheless been as winged

arrows of God and have pierced men's hearts and laid them wounded at Jesus' feet. I have often lifted up my hands in astonishment and said, 'How can this be? How can God bless such feeble instrumentality?' The key word here is "instrumentality." We are those earthen vessels, we are the instruments.

The power is in the Word. Therefore the clarity with which we present the Word is ultimately what preaching is about and not what you may be tempted to think this course is about. What is this course about? Well, if I just get the preaching outline right, if I can just deliver this well, then I will be a great preacher. Actually, no. It is the clarity of the Word, because the Word contains the power. There are many key verses by which the Scriptures relate this to us. The power of God inherent in the Word comes, we know, because the Word of God is what created the world and the universe as we know it. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. He spoke, and it came to be. The power of creation was in the Word. The Word of God continues to control everything around us. Psalm 137:15-19 says,

He sends his command to the earth;  
his word runs swiftly.  
He spreads the snow like wool  
and scatters the frost like ashes.  
He hurls down his hail like pebbles.  
Who can withstand his icy blast?  
He sends his word and melts them;  
he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.  
He has revealed his word to Jacob,  
his laws and decrees to Israel.

"He sends his word and melts them..." That is an amazing thought, is it not? The Word of God continues to be active in persuading other people. "Let the one who has my word speak it faithfully [...] Is not my word like fire [...] and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:28-29). Some of you have friends you want to come to Christ, family you have prayed for for years. And you wonder what will finally break them. What does God say will finally break through? It is the Word that breaks a rock, a hard heart; it is faithfulness to what God Himself expresses. The Word of God performs the purposes for which He Himself designed it. "As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth [...] so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55: 10-11). One of the amazing passages in Scripture whereby the inherent power of the Word is demonstrated is that in Philippians where Paul says, "I am in prison, and while I am in prison I am still rejoicing that the Word is going forth. Now, some people are preaching it out of false motives. Some people are preaching it out of good motives. But I rejoice for both because as long as the Word goes forth it is still accomplishing God's purposes." Now, that is an amazing thought. People can even misuse it for their purposes, and God still uses it for His purposes. The Word has this inherent power in it that takes the burden off us of saying, "Unless I do it exactly right, it has no power." No, it has power beyond us. It has sufficiency unto itself, which ultimately gives me much confidence when I preach. There is not some magic when I preach—the Word has the power.

Why does the Word have that power? Because it is actually communicating Christ Himself, the divine *Logos*. Remember, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Who is being described? Christ. If He is described as "the Word," He is God still speaking to us in incarnate form, fleshly form—the Word presented. This is what God is saying to us, what Christ Himself represents. Why is this important? Because we recognize that, by the Word,

creation came into being. That is part of His power. “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). The Word of God created. Here the Scripture uses a pun, does it not? God spoke, and it came to be, but the Word was also the means by which Christ came into creation and created creation. He is in fact that Word of creation. He is also the Word of the new creation (James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23). Hear the pun used explicitly in Scripture. James says, “He [that is, God] chose to give us birth through the word of truth.” What do you think James is talking about when he says that “God chose to give us birth through the word of truth”? Is he talking about the inscripturated Word, or the incarnate Word? The answer, of course, is both. He chose to give us life through “the Word of truth”—that is the Word about Jesus and the Word that is Jesus. Even more explicit is Peter’s saying: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” You have been born again by the word of God. Again, is it the inscripturated Word that is referred to or is it the incarnate Word that makes us born again? Again, it is a trick question. The answer is both. God is presenting Himself to us in the Word so much so that when He presents Christ to us He says, “This is the Word.”

Now it begins to be really amazing. What are the implications of that? If Christ is the Word, and when I speak I am presenting the Word of God, then when I speak, who is speaking? Is God yet speaking? Augustine said it this way, “When the Bible speaks, God speaks.” Thus if I say what the Bible says, who is still speaking? I know it is my voice coming out, but who is still speaking? God is still speaking to His people, through the human instruments who are faithful to His Word. Citing this, the Second Helvetic Confession (the early Reformers’ confession) sounds too bold to be true. It sounds almost heretical. But this is what it says, “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.” That is a very simple statement, but think of the implications. The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. God spoke, and creation came into being. He spoke, and it stood fast. I speak, and (if I am faithful to the Word of God) He still speaks. Thus Luther says, “The church is God’s mouth-house.” It is the house of God by which God is speaking to His people and into the culture. God is still speaking. Most bold was Calvin, and he said it this way: “God has so chosen, by His Spirit, to anoint the tongue and the lips of His preachers so that when they speak, the voice of Jesus resounds.” But we want to think, “That was just me, it was just me speaking!”

Have you ever sat around the table during a holiday and thought, “Lord, here are all my unsaved loved ones around this table. If only Jesus were here to talk to them! If only Jesus were here, then they would listen.” God has so chosen to anoint the lips and tongues of His preachers by His Spirit, that when they speak His Word, Jesus still speaks. Now, did everyone accept the voice of Jesus? Did everyone say, “Oh, it is Jesus—I will go with Him!”? Did everyone do that? No. But those whom God was calling to Himself, those whom He designed to have their hearts broken—as the Word will break a rock—those persons were persuaded by the voice of Jesus, which we yet possess when we speak the Word of God. It is not magic. It is not a question of “Did I use the right formula? Did I say the right words? Did I use the right tone of voice? Did I raise my hands just the right way?” No, it is the commitment to the truth of God’s Word that yet contains the power of God’s Word. That gives me such confidence.

The writer of Hebrews says it this way, “The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). That which we speak is yet living and active. Here is that activity of God, yet present and working, living and active as we speak the words of these pages of Scripture 2000 years later. Yet it is presently working because the Word of God is yet living and active. Thus Paul could say in Romans 1:16, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for *it* is the power of God for our salvation” (emphasis added). The good news, the truth of God—I am not ashamed of it because I recognize more and more that it is the power of God, communicated to His servants. And I am one of

them! I am not capable in myself. But given this might, given this *dunamis*, this power that is inherent to the Scriptures because it is the Word, when I present it, God is yet doing amazing works of creation even through such as I.

Now we think of Spurgeon again. Why was he so able? Because he knew he was so insufficient. He kept getting out of the way. How could God bless one whose efforts are as feeble as my own? How could I be an instrument in His hands? Because that is all I am, I rely entirely on Him—thus His power comes to the fore. There are many ways in which this is said. Maybe it is best just to express it in what you know.

A friend and I were just talking before class about friends we have from our past. Do you have friends from the past you remember from high school or maybe college days, and you realize that you and they are now living entirely different lives? Maybe they are living in a pagan, self-serving, totally lost condition. I think of a couple of friends of mine. A boy I knew in high school, a friend of mine, basically lived for football and the weekends. There was also a girl I knew who basically lived to be appreciated by men; her life was basically giving herself to others in dating. I have kept track of those friends through the years. During college one of them became a Christian. And the other, after he became a parent and had a child who was diagnosed with cancer, also became a Christian. Both became Christians. I thought, “How did that happen? Was it something I said? Was it something a preacher at church said?” How could I say that? Here were people who were walking after idols, totally self-consumed. They turned from themselves to serve the living and true God. Scripture says they turned from idolatry to serve the living and true God. How did that happen? Was it because of some words, little puffs of air out of my mouth, some vocalization of syllables? How does that happen? Is not the Word of God like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces? This happened not by anything in me, but by the wonder of the Word that is committed to us. It has such power that even when I recognize my weakness, my feebleness, my frailness, my lack of adequate instrumentality, I say, “Thank you, Lord, for Your Word that takes the burden off of me. As long as I am faithful to it, it performs Your purposes.” I have a much lesser obligation than I would if it were up to some sort of dramatic presentation to make the Word of God work. My goal is simply to make the Word of God clear. When I have done that, the Word of God works.

Now we need to talk about how that occurs. The power of God—if you think of this Word and the power it has, how is it applied? One powerful way in which it is applied is by expository preaching. The power of the Word is applied in expository preaching. Now, we will do much defining of terms as the semester continues. Let us first define the term “expository preaching,” and then we will talk about its advantages. How is the power of the Word of God applied in expository preaching? Well, first, let us define what expository preaching is. It is this simple: the meaning of the message is the message of the passage. The meaning of the message (or the sermon) is the message of the passage. So, what the passage means is what the sermon will be about. Now, what the Bible says, God says. The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. Thus all expository preaching is trying to do, at its essence, is to say, “What is the meaning of that passage? That is the meaning of the message I will be preaching.” That is expository preaching.

If you use expository preaching, what are the advantages? When the message of the passage is also the message of the sermon, what are the advantages? There are three. First, expository preaching confronts people with the truth of the Word. It is that truth that is so powerful. So if expository preaching is simply saying what the Word says, making the truth plain, then we are confronting others with the truth of the Word that has power. It is not my opinion and not the philosophies of men. I do not take a poll to find out what I should be saying. The power is in the Word, and expository preaching is saying, “I want to confront you with the truth of the Word because that is where the power is.

A second advantage of expository preaching is that it confronts people with the authority of the Word. You may have read in the preface to *Christ Centered Preaching* where I said basically, What is the great debate in our culture today? It is the debate not only over meaning, but authority. Does anyone have the right to tell me what to do? What is the basic answer of our American society to that question? “No! Nobody has the right to tell me what to do!” But God does. And God has spoken. Thus my goal in expository preaching is to say, “Now, I am telling you what you must do, not on the basis of my authority but on the basis of God’s authority.” I have no authority. “I too am a man under authority,” said the apostle. Do you remember? Do not listen because of what I say. Listen to the One whom I speak for. When I speak the truth of God, I can do so with boldness because my authority is not my own. I speak with the authority of the Word of God. Now, that is again taking the burden off of me of thinking, “I have to accomplish this.” No, it is not on me to make you believe. Nor is it on me to say, “You must believe because I say it.” You must believe and respond because God said it. It is His authority as well as His truth. When the meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon, I speak with God’s authority.

Finally, expository preaching confronts with the power of the Spirit. Who or what alone can change the hearts of men and women? Can you do it? No, you cannot. The Holy Spirit working by and with the Word in our hearts alone can change people. Who or what alone can change the hearts of people *eternally*? The Holy Spirit, working by and with the Word in our hearts. That is the specific language of the Westminster Confession, in the first chapter and fifth paragraph. It is a wonderful expression of what we understand God must accomplish through His ministers. It is not, you see, the Holy Spirit working apart from the Word. Any number of people will say, “The Spirit said...” and then gross heresy results. It is the Holy Spirit using what God uses to create the new creation and the original creation. He creates a new creation in us, new life, new conformity to His Word. And it is His Word that He uses. But He who inspired the Word is still illuminating us so that we will receive that Word and understand it—the Holy Spirit working by and with the Word. Thus, what does expository preaching do? It makes sure that the Holy Spirit has the right “raw material” for doing that work of construction that must be done in the human heart. I do not depend on something other than the Word to be used by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will use God’s Word to convince and change people. Therefore what I do in expository preaching is say, “Here is the Word,” so that people will be confronted with the power of the Spirit. It is this amazing thought. When I preach, I recognize I am never the first preacher. I am always the second preacher. The first preacher is always the Spirit. He gave the Word, and He is working already in the hearts of those who will receive it. Therefore when I speak I am a servant of the work of the Spirit. I come along after. I speak in conformity with what the Spirit is doing, but the Spirit is the first preacher. Thus I seek to work in such a way that the Spirit’s work is made manifest in the hearts of others.

Now, if I say all that—that expository preaching seeks to confront with the work of the Spirit—then I recognize that technical excellence is not really what preaching is about. Recognizing that undercuts much of what people think they will get in a preparation and delivery course. Are we not supposed to be talking about excellence in preaching? Yes. The fact that the power is in the Word does not mean we are to be stumbling blocks to others, right? At the same time, we are to recognize that the power cannot be in us or else we will actually hurt other people.

I want you to listen to a biographer describe Edward Erving. Now, you have probably never heard of Edward Erving, though he was the greatest renowned preacher of his era. Listen to what the biographer of Erving says. (Erving was the preacher in London in the nineteenth century to which all the celebrities went and the people of government). This is what his biographer says, “The effect of his preaching was to leave men dazzled and stupefied rather than convinced or converted. They went home marveling at the eloquence of the orator rather than mourning over their sins and yearning for God.” That is a rather stark condemnation, is it not? He was a great preacher. People just marveled at how he spoke. But what

did it accomplish spiritually? Virtually nothing. Now, let us compare that to a couple of other preachers from an earlier, and then from a later, era. Some of you have read these words already from Robert S. Rayburn, the son of Dr. Rayburn who used to teach this course. He wrote this to encourage us. He says:

The Lord will use what little we have. But His blessing ultimately is the key to our preaching rather than our abilities. Church history furnishes us with grand illustrations of this fact. I think, for example, of the court preachers of Louis XIV's day. In mid-seventeenth century France, that court was as decadent and depraved as any kingly court ever was. Yet all the while, it professed earnestly its Christianity. For its appointed preachers it had Jean Massillon and Jacques Bossuet. Theirs were some of the greatest preaching ever produced in the history of the church. It was not only some of the most eloquent and powerful oratory ever heard. It was pious and blunt, intensely earnest, unafraid, and for seventeenth-century Catholicism, it was highly evangelical. This is the same Jean Massillon, you may remember, who when appointed to preach Louis XIV's funeral sermon ascended into the high pulpit of Notre Dame, surveyed the great congregation, including the crowned heads of Europe, and forever honored the office of preacher by saying to them, "In the hour of death, only God is great." And what was the consequence of that bold, courageous, evangelical preaching? Nothing. The Spirit did not blow on that occasion. But a few years later, in Cambuslang near Glasgow, Scotland, there was a minister named William M'Culloch. He was so bad a preacher that he was nicknamed "the ale preacher" because when he got up to speak, all the men left for the pubs. His own son says of his father, "He was not eloquent. He was very different from the popular orators of his time." After being licensed, it took him nine years to get his first pastorate. But it was upon these ineloquent, poorly constructed, poorly delivered sermons that the Spirit of God fell in 1742 and produced such a spiritual awakening in Scotland such as has not been known since. He was no Massillon, but it was not M'Culloch's gifts that were the key, but the Spirit.

Who alone can convert the hearts of men and women? Only the Spirit, working by and with the Word in our hearts—not our oratory, not our excellence. But when we present the Word of God, it is the Spirit who then can use us as His instruments, though we are weak, ineloquent, and seemingly poor vessels. Commitment to the truth of God's Word is the enabling of the work of the Spirit for the purposes of God's Word. If you think of the effectiveness of the Word, you have to say, "How is it made effective in the lives of people?" This may seem to undercut just a little of what I have said. For while the power is in the Word, you know that we can get in the way. Can we not? How do we make sure that people are getting the Word and that we are not in the way? How is the effectiveness of the Word promoted by testimony?

I want to talk to you about Aristotle's distinctions of what is included in every persuasive message. Now, if we were in medical school, this would be the time in the class when you recognize that we will begin to get definitions. If you are in medical school, much of the first year you are simply learning the terminology. Homileticians do the same thing. We will be looking at sermons in this class, and we will be preaching sermons. Thus we need to know some common terminology. This is helpful so that we can dissect, as it were, but also so that we can heal—so that we know what we are talking about as we look at the different components.

One way of thinking about that is to think of the elements that go into a message that make it persuasive historically and what are unique aspects of that as we talk about getting people into confrontation with the Word of God. One way to think about it is this: every persuasive message is made up of at least three components. The first is called *logos* historically. What does *logos* mean in Greek? It means "word." It is the words, it is the verbal content. *Logos* is the verbal content of the message. It includes not only the

words used but also the argument used, its craft, and the logic of the message. What is the verbal message? That is the *logos* part of the message.

A second major component of any message is *pathos*, which is the emotive content. *Pathos* is the passion, emotion, or feeling with which something is expressed. Now, I must tell you it is sometimes hard for people, particularly men and young men in our culture, to feel the weight of *pathos*. This is because we are trained in a John Wayne, Indiana Jones culture—men are supposed to be stoic. To really be strong you do not express emotion. And there is, we all recognize, a manipulative sort of preaching that expresses emotion just for effect. But I want you to recognize how dangerous preaching that shows no passion can be. Read this without emotion: “And if you do not receive Christ, you will probably go to hell. Now let us look at the next page...” What did you just say? It was once said of Moody that he was one of the few people qualified to speak of hell, because he could not do it without weeping. It grieved him so much, and people knew it did. There is this sense that if the message does not move you, if it does not seem to have any impact on you, then why would you expect it to have an impact on anyone else? To speak of the love of God in a way that does not move you is actually to speak untruth. It is to say, “This is not very important. This is not very significant.” Your manner is now contradicting your message. This is a standard rule of communicators: if your manner contradicts your message, your manner will be believed. Thus the manner needs to go with the message.

One of the wonderful preachers of the nineteenth century was Robert Murray McShane. He was a wonderful preacher. He sparked a revival in Scotland, and then he died before age 30. He was the age of many of you in this classroom here when he was known as one of the greatest preachers of the English Isles. If you want to hear some hint of why he was so listened to, listen to his own diary. This is what he wrote on February 21st, 1836: “Preached twice in Larbourn on the righteousness of God from Romans 1:16. In the morning was more engaged in preparing the head than the heart. This has frequently been my error, and I always felt the evil of it. Reform it, then, O Lord.” What is he saying? “My sermon had become just a lecture. I was just giving them information. I prepared my head, but not my heart.” Some weeks later on March 5th, he again wrote in his diary: “Preached again in Larbourn, with very much comfort, owing chiefly to my remedying the error of 21st February. Therefore the heart and the mouth were both full. ‘Enlarge my heart, and I shall run,’ said David. Lord, enlarge my heart, and I shall preach.” This is a wonderful expression, is it not? “Enlarge my heart.” When you speak to God’s people, do they see your heart full? Are you able to express this? Now, our personalities vary greatly, right? But the goal is to say things as though you deeply mean them. You will vary. Our personalities vary. But in whatever way shows the depth of your feeling, talk to people that way—as though you care. Do this because it bears so much on the final aspect of persuasion; that is *ethos*.

The final component of every persuasive message is *ethos*. *Ethos* is the perceived character of the speaker. What is the key adjective there? “Perceived.” It is not the actual character of the speaker. You may say, “Well, I know I am not like that!” Well, how are you being perceived? *Ethos* is the perceived character of the speaker. That is one of the reasons *logos* and *pathos* are so important. What is your character perceived to be if you are disorganized? It seems that you do not care. What is perceived about you if you do not speak with passion? It is perceived that you do not care. You may care very much! But by inattention to *logos* and *pathos*, *ethos* is damaged. What everyone has known throughout the centuries, if you were evaluating the importance of these three—*logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*—which is the most important for persuading people? *Ethos*, the perceived character of the speaker. You know this. Some of you may go to visit a friend on holiday who tells you about his wonderful preacher. Then you go listen to him and you wonder how you will talk about it with your friend, because you were not impressed. Why do they think he is so good? Because they know him. They know his heart, they know his care, they know his compassion. They listen to character, and the character becomes part of the



vehicle for hearing the Word of God. That is why the apostle would say, “We put no stumbling block in other people’s path.” It is our character that we recognize is part of the means by which people hear the Word of God. The path of the Gospel is the Word. We would recognize that the Word of God is what convinces. But somehow the listener has to get into contact with the Word. Thus we tell the meaning of the Word—that is *logos*, the verbal content. But if we have heart feelings, passion that does not show, if our manner contradicts our message, that becomes a barrier to people hearing the content of the Word. And of course, if our character does not reflect the meaning of the Word, then people will say, “What you do speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say.” Thus character becomes part of the point as well.

The listener has to go through these “doors” of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* to be in confrontation with the Word. Paul says it this way (in 1 Thessalonians 1:5), “Our gospel came to you not simply in words, but also in power and the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.” “Our gospel came to you not simply in words...” that is the *logos*. “...[B]ut also in power and the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction,” that is the *pathos*. “You know how we lived among you for your sake,” that is the *ethos*. These became absolutely key, the two components of *ethos* that you hear: “You know how we lived among you for your sake.”

When those who study persuasive speech say what *ethos* is, it is always two components. It is credibility—do you know what you are talking about?—and compassion. Does the speaker appear to care about the listeners? If the speaker appears to care more about himself, what will you think of him? What is the reaction of listeners? It is to remove themselves from the speech. I do not want to be manipulated. If your main goal is your reputation, I will distrust you and not accept what you say. The very reason, you see, that preachers sometimes speak with boldness what they know will hurt people, is that the people know what they are doing. They are putting themselves at risk for the sake of the people. Preachers who ultimately only say what people want to hear finally are never heard. This is because people know of such preachers, “You do not care enough about me to put yourself at risk. When you care more about me than yourself, then I will listen to you (sometimes), even when you say very hard things, because you love me that much.” Again, if the goal is simply to assert your authority—“This is why you have to listen to me”—then I will not listen to you. Once again, your concern is for yourself. Now, how do people read all these things? By *ethos*. It is the involvement of the life of the minister with the people. Sometimes we preachers may think, “I could be a great preacher if they would just give me 40 hours a week in my study, if I could just concentrate on my message.” But the fact of the matter is that if there is not life on life, word will not be heard. It is actually that wonderful balance of having sufficient study to be credible and sufficient involvement to be known to be compassionate. The pulpit is not the only place where you preach. In fact, if it is the only place you preach, you will not be heard. It is involvement in life that gives foundation to what is said in the pulpit. These things can be seen in many places in Scripture. I think my favorite pastoral passage is 1 Thessalonians 2:3-8 and 11-12. As I read this, I want you to hear how the apostle talks about the power of what is moving forward and how it does. He writes:

For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father

deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

Paul was not using magic to make the Scripture work. That was the seven sons of Sceva. Remember them? They would just use the name of Jesus as a magic spell, and they thought that would make things happen. But Paul says, “We are not trying to trick you.” Paul later says, “We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.” What is he arguing for? Why should they listen to him? Here he is saying they should listen to him because they know he, Silas, and Timothy are trustworthy before God, even so trustworthy that they will not try to please their listeners but please God instead. Note these words, “...we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children.” Now, here the New International Version (NIV) is being kind of gentle on our sensibilities. The literal Greek language here is “we were as gentle among you as a mother nursing her baby.” Here is an apostle! Does he have a right to be bold? Does he have authority? But he wanted to show them his compassion. “We were as gentle among you as a mother caring for her little children.” He then says, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God [*logos*] but our lives as well [*ethos*], because you had become so dear to us.” Wow, what a statement. “We have delighted to share not only the gospel but our lives as well, because we were so concerned for you.” Thus here the *logos* travels with the *ethos*, recognizing that becomes the way in which the gospel is heard.

Look now at 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter [...] flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace [...]. Do not have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments.” “Study to show yourself approved unto God...” Now, that is almost surprising language. “Study so that you will proclaim the Word of God correctly,” is what we expect to hear said. But no. He says, “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” It is actually *ethos* now that comes into view prior to *logos*. Before you rightly proclaim the Word of truth, you are showing yourself approved unto God. “Do not have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments.” This is a hard command for seminary students sometimes. I love to argue. I do! My college background was competitive speech and debate. I just love a good argument. I had to recognize early in my ministry that this would not serve me in the church. If the reason you come to seminary is so you will have a great debate, that may be fun for you but Paul said, “The man of God must not strive, he must not be known as a lover of debate.” I loved you so much. Yes, I would do everything I can to convince you, to make you know. But it is not about loving the debate, rather it is loving the product of truth. What is this doing in your heart? Am I actually caring enough about you to watch what happens to you and the people around us as we “simply engage in dialogue because it is fun to cross swords”? It does not serve the church. What are we doing? Defending truth or enjoying the battle?

Paul says to Titus in Titus 2:7-8, “In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned.” Now, at this point in the lesson I hope you are feeling a certain tension. Early on, I was saying, “It is not all on you. The power is in the Word.” Now what have I spent the last 10 minutes talking about? Your obligation, your responsibility, your faithfulness. How do those two things come together? Let me try to explain it this way. How do we reconcile the power in the Word and the place of *ethos* in the ordinary process of preaching effectively? I think it is this balance. God can work apart from us. Can He do that? Paul rejoices that whether taught by right motives or wrong, the Word is going forth. God can work apart from us. But He chooses more often to work through us. In that He uses our character to confirm the truth of His Word. So where does that leave us? It is here: His ability to work without us removes the burden of thinking, “I have to do it right or it will not work.” Do you hear that? His ability to work

without us removes the burden. His willingness to work through us grants us the blessing of knowing our labor is not in vain. Thus we have this burden taken off of us and still have the blessing of knowing that God rewards faithfulness. If I am not faithful, I am not rejected. If I am not able enough, I do not say, “Oh no! God cannot now work.” No, the burden is off of me. But I have the wonderful blessing to know that He is able to use my efforts—which I want to give Him. That is true of the heart of a believer. I want to serve my God, I want to use my gifts for His purposes. God blesses me by saying, “I will use them. It is My choice to do that, even though I do not need to do that.”

What are the implications, then, of this *ethos* power, if we recognize that God can use it powerfully, even though He does not need to? There are three main implications. First, guard your heart. Guard your heart if *ethos* can be so used of God. Archibald Alexander said it this way, “There is no person that needs to be more in constant exercise of prayer than the theological student. In the midst of studies, his heart should be raised to God for help and direction more consistently than in any other place in society.” As you take in all this information, this material from the Word of God, know that what you are taking in will be used of God, and say, “I must guard my heart so that I will not take this improperly.” This is especially important as foundations are laid for all future ministry in life. Whether you know it or not, you see, this *ethos* enables us to witness to others and also to know the Word.

So far, we have talked about witness the most. People examine who you are and decide whether they will listen. We know holiness of life is necessary (most of the time) for the effective communication of truth. Do you know that holiness of life is also necessary for the knowledge of truth? That is a rather startling thought. By communing with God, I actually know more than I would know without Him. I cannot express to you all I wish I could in this regard. But you know it. Why are there certain ministers you have to listen to? It may be because they seem to have special spiritual insight. They walk with God, and something in you knows that. And because they walk with God, they seem to have—not a pipeline of special revelation—but their hearts resonate in such a way. They live in a way that makes God’s truth powerful in its communication. I think of A. B. Earl. He was a great Baptist evangelist in the last century. He wrote (prior to the radio and TV age) of what he thought would be so effective in communicating the Gospel to others. He ultimately recognized it was his own heart’s communion with God that would be effective. He wrote in his own diary these words, “This day, for the sake of God’s people, I make a new consecration of my all to Jesus Christ. I now and forever give myself to Him, my soul to be washed in His blood and saved in heaven at last, my whole body to be used for His glory, my mouth to speak for Him at all times, my eyes to weep over lost sinners, my feet to carry me where He wants me to go, my heart to be burdened for souls, my intellect to be employed at all times for His glory. I give Him my wife, my children, my property. All I have and all I ever shall be, I give to Him that I may obey every known duty for the sake of my Savior and His message.” Do you think this man knew something of the Lord? I think he knew more. Those who counted said that by the time he was done he was responsible for hundreds of thousands of conversions, in the pre-electronic era. Amazing. He knew more by walking with that. You will discover more and more of that, will you not? You will see it around you. Not to be judgmental of anyone, but the men who seem to be so intellectually gifted and yet so cold contrast with those who seem so warm toward God and what you really want to learn from them.

A second implication of the power of *ethos* is that we should become well acquainted with the grace your heart requires. Becoming well acquainted with the grace your heart requires is a recognition of something. Once we put so much weight on *ethos*, every one of you should say, “But I cannot do that! I cannot do that.” Here is this wonderful example of A. B. Earl who was willing to give everything to God. We recognize the power of that. But ultimately, A. B. Earl was preaching the Gospel, and the Gospel said, “I am not dependent on my work. I, in my best efforts, recognize my failures before God. Therefore I am dependent on His love and mercy on my behalf.” If you are to preach grace, you must

know it. And knowing it means you put before Him not only the willingness to obey God, but also the constant heart of confession. “Lord, as much as I will to do well, I fail. Though I want to do good, I do not. Teach me of Your love, teach me of Your mercy.” When you then experience grace, it is not your *ethos* that is the power of the Word. Rather, it is your recognition of God’s conforming your character to Himself by His grace and despite your character. Then your heart for God enlarges, and the grace of God begins to motivate you. Then you become one whose character is not only observed by God’s people, but whose compassion is felt by God’s people. You know the grace of God. Character, when pursued, leads you to a sense of failure. And failure rightly responded to teaches you much of the grace of God, which makes you desire to be all the more conformed to His image. It is interesting how that works, is it not? When I pursue character for His sake, I know the need of His grace. When I experience His grace, I long, so much more, for more of His character. It is my blessing, then, to follow it.

We guard our hearts and we become well acquainted with the grace that is in our hearts. The last implication of the power of *ethos* is this: believe in the grace that says you can be a great preacher. Dr. Rayburn, when he would teach this class at this portion of the lesson would always say to us, “You will have different levels of skill. Some of you are naturally gifted speakers, and some of you are not. But if your heart loves the Word of God and the people of God, the words you say—even if they barely crawl over the lip of the pulpit—will be heard by God’s people.” What they are listening for is someone who understands the grace of God. They listen for this more than for anything else. More than eloquence, more than great arguments, what people listen for is “Do you understand the truth of God so well that you can explain the Gospel to me? Why did I come into this church? Just so I would get more information? Just so that you could tell me that it is hard to raise kids? I knew that before I sat down! Why did I sit down? Do you not have a word of God for me? Is there not some healing you can provide?” When you know the grace of God, God can greatly use you. Believing in that grace is ultimately what makes you a great preacher. More than any other thing, it is ultimately understanding the work He has done on your behalf. Do you remember how Paul said it to Timothy? There he was, a young man fearing he would not be able to minister at Ephesus. Paul said, “Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given to you through prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters. Give yourself wholly to them so that everyone can observe your progress.” Think of that. You are to put yourself on the line for people so that they can observe you as they hear what you are teaching. Be diligent in these matters. Watch your life and your doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do you will save both yourself and your hearers. Watch your life but also what you teach, because you are teaching what saves people. Teach that and when you do, it will not only be nourishment to you but to many others as well. I want you to believe it deeply. God can greatly use you. Not because of your gifts, primarily, but because of your heart. Set on Him, you can lead others to His healing and His salvation forever.

Do you feel the tension that I mentioned to you, of God saying, “I can work without you, but I choose to work with you. And if I will work with you, I need your heart as well as your words.”? Of course now we say, “But my heart is not pure enough.” That is right, but remember that God is sufficient still. This takes the burden off of us, even as it gives us the delight of knowing that we can be used of God. Who or what alone can change the hearts of men and women eternally? The Holy Spirit working by and with the Word in our hearts. In answer to a question, it is difficult to acknowledge that *ethos* is the perceived character of the speaker. We all know that we can be perceived wrongly. But if people perceive me in a way that I do not intend, I have to recognize that and deal with it. Dr. Sanderson, when he taught here, used to say the way you should test any candidate for preaching is to play softball with them. When they are safe on second base on a close play, call them out and see what happens. What he means is, what

people perceive about a person largely determines how they will receive what he says. Philip Brooks' famous statement is "Preaching is truth poured through personality." Now, there are many different personalities. But if I think you are a liar, will I listen to you? If I think you do not care about me, will I listen to you? This is actually, I think, one of the weaknesses of my background, and I think this is true of many young men in my setting. When you come from families where you are taught to be stoic, not to show emotion, then it is more difficult to begin preaching and realize, "If I act like this does not matter, then I am perceived as not caring." I care greatly! But my manner is something trained from my youth that I have to in some ways war against in order to adequately communicate what God is saying. Now, this has much to do with personality. Some people, if they so much as lift an eyebrow, they are perceived to really mean what they say. But other people need to be very demonstrative because they are demonstrative all the time, so to act like they really mean something they need to be more demonstrative. We will talk about this more later, about how we can express things so that we do not miscommunicate what we are trying to say. There are simple things at times that we do and do not recognize.

For now, recognize that character comes across in ways we do not even know about. Sometimes when you are in a conversation with a person you have only known for five minutes, you make all kinds of judgments about them simply by their choice of words and the way they hold their body. What scares us is that speech communicators say people usually make those judgments in the first 30 seconds—whether or not you care about them and are willing to listen to them and whether or not they are willing to listen to you. Now, we are not with people for only 30 seconds. As pastors, we are with people for years and years. Recognizing that our perceived character really weighs in their minds, whether we are worth listening to—recognizing this is both important and deadly, if I do not believe in the grace of God—they will perceive my weaknesses as louder than my strengths. Therefore I need to know greatly, "God has forgiven me." That is what gets me back up here. He makes me His own, despite my weaknesses. Perceived character will always be a difficult issue. But it has to be in our minds as we evaluate giving ourselves for other people. It is not just about working in my comfort zone, right? We might think, "Well, I am comfortable with this." But how are you being perceived? That has to be taken into account as well. How do I find out how I am perceived? People will talk with you about what they are unhappy about. John Stott and many other preachers put themselves under the discipline of meeting with people weekly to get feedback on their messages. This is because they recognize that we can be the worst perceivers of ourselves. You have to have a certain strength and confidence to be able to do that, to ask, "What do you think?" We need to trust God enough and understand people enough to properly filter what they say. Certain people will come at you no matter what. You may need to say, "There is a certain legitimacy to what you are saying, but I need to remember who you are." And other people will never say anything unless something is really wrong, and if they say something then you really need to listen. That is some of that pastoral prudence coming forward. What do I need to listen to? What do I actually, before God, have to turn a deaf ear to?

Someone has asked, what is the difference between becoming credible for the sake of perceived understanding and becoming manipulative and not authentic? You have to understand that you have to do certain things so much that they become authentic for you. For example, if you just say, "I am not a demonstrative person. That is not in my nature. So I will not gesture when I talk." What I would say is, "Do you know what you need to do? You need to over-gesture when you practice, gesture all the time while you are talking. Then when you are speaking, it will be natural to you." You do enough of what is outside your comfort zone so that it becomes comfortable and natural to you. I am not talking about becoming a different person. But we must recognize that we cannot say, "Well, I am just a soft-spoken person, so I will talk softly when I preach." That does not work. You will have to raise your voice. And

if you consistently raise your voice, then it becomes not just something you put on, but it becomes natural to you.

## **What is the Big Idea?**

In this lesson, let me review what we did last time. Who alone has the power to change hearts? The Holy Spirit, working by and with the Word in our hearts. Remember, that is the point. It is not the Holy Spirit working independently of His Word but rather taking the Word and applying it to our hearts. The One who inspired the Word also inspires the messenger so that our hearts receive it properly. Thus the Holy Spirit, working by and with the Word in our hearts, is the power by which God transforms people eternally. He does not merely change their behavior but transforms them. What aspect of preaching is the most persuasive, *ethos*, *pathos*, or *logos*? *Ethos* is the most important. What is *logos*? It is the verbal content. That includes not just the words, but also the logic content as well. *Pathos* means what? The emotive content of the message. And what is *ethos*? The perceived character of the speaker. Those are key thoughts. It is important to know, of course, that when you are inadequate in *ethos*, it is the sufficiency of the Word that takes the burden of transforming men and women off of us. But that is not to say that the Spirit does not use our gifts. We are instruments. Granted, the Spirit can get around our weaknesses, but the normal way God works is by using the character of the one speaking to confirm the authenticity of the Word. God can work past us, and that takes the burden off of us. At the same time, we have the blessing of being instruments in God's hands. For those who are renewed by the Spirit, being able to serve God for His glory is part of our blessing and our joy. Let us pray to God this morning as we praise Him for the joy He works in us. Let us pray together.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You that Your blessings are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness. We know it is Your faithfulness that has brought us here and ultimately that will equip us to go from this place with the message of Your Word. And so we pray that the mercies You give us would be plain not only to our hearts, but that You would be equipping us through what we do in this class to make those mercies plain to others as well. We acknowledge before You in humility that we are only earthen vessels, but with joy we proclaim that You pour Your glory out of earthen vessels so that the glory is all Yours. Grant, Father, Your blessing on us by Your Spirit even now, making us conformed to Your purposes and filling us with Your glory. For the sake of Your Son and our Savior, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

As we begin, the goal of this lesson is to understand the essential components of a well constructed sermon. Just to think about what that is, let me reflect from your readings a bit. Why would the following be a terrible outline for a sermon? Here is my first point: *agape* is one of three Greek words for love. My second main point is this: Esau was a hairy man. And my third main point is this: expiation refers to the turning aside of the wrath of God. Now, everything I just said is true. Everything I just said is biblical; it is all in the Bible. Why would this make a terrible sermon? What do these three main points lack that is necessary for a well-constructed sermon? They lack unity. There is nothing that seems to pull together the components of this sermon. Though it is all true, there is nothing linking these three very disparate ideas of three Greek words for love, Esau being a hairy man, and expiation. It also lacks purpose. While we may begin to think that there is some reason to know about three Greek words for love, at the same time knowing that expiation is the turning away of God's wrath—while true—does not appear to have the same purpose as the earlier point. And because it does not have purpose, it also lacks apparent application. It is these three things that are necessary for all good sermonic preparation. Every sermon must have unity, purpose, and application. Having said these things, we now want to explore them in depth.

Unity is the key concept. How many things is a sermon about? One thing. Sermons may have many facets, many components, many subsets of a central idea. But essentially, every sermon is about one thing. Now, we need to talk about why that is. What is the need for sermonic unity? Well, the first

reason we need unity is that preachers need focus. The speaker himself needs focus. Why? Well, first because the old hymn is true of us: we are prone to wander, yes we feel it. There are so many interesting and wonderful things to say from the Scriptures! And yet we recognize that we have been in sermons and, sadly, may have produced sermons that just seem to wander about. They do not seem to have a central purpose that people can grab onto. A second reason we need unity as preachers is that preachers need focus to funnel the infinite exegetical possibilities.

If you were to go over to the library and begin to research any particular verse, you will be overwhelmed initially. You will see that there are many commentaries dealing with any portion of the Scriptures. That means books have been written or could be written on practically any verse. There are near limitless exegetical possibilities of what could be said about any portion of Scripture. And while it seems at first constraining—oh no, I just have to concentrate on this one central idea!—ultimately you will find it to be very liberating. When you are in that labyrinth of infinite exegetical possibilities, there are so many things you could say that you just get overwhelmed with the possibilities. When you are able to say, “I know there are many things I could say, but I will relate those things that deal with my central purpose,” then actually you feel freed from all the possibilities, all the complexities of the sermon that could be there. John Stott in some tongue-in-cheek way says, “The torture of every preacher is that he has to throw away 90% of what he knows about any particular message when he preaches the sermon.” There is so much any passage contains, but being able to focus is what allows us to move forward and our listeners to move forward with us. Of course, that is the other reason we need sermonic unity. It is not merely because speakers need focus. Our listeners need focus as well. If you were to go to research virtually any passage of Scripture, you will find in the commentary sections of the seminary library book after book on any passage you are looking at. Now you have to say, “I have to preach on this in a timeframe.” It varies from state to state and from nation to nation, but the average for evangelical churches is about a 30-minute message. Well, you will come across material that would be sufficient for 300 30-minute messages as I look at virtually any passage. Thus, if I have these infinite exegetical possibilities, how do I know what I will grab on to? How do I know, out of all these possibilities, what I will say? The thing that will free you from this infinite labyrinth of possibilities is unity. We will press hard on it this semester, and we will say, “Yes, all those things are true, but what is the thing you are trying to say in this message?” I will just tell you, initially it feels so constraining—I could tell you all of this, but you are making me focus on just this! When I know where I am directing things to, I actually have some basis for the choices I will be making out of all the possibilities available. Thus, speakers need unity because we are prone to wander. But also, it actually helps us with the infinite exegetical opportunities.

Of course, another reason for sermonic unity is not only that speakers need focus, but that listeners need focus. One of the things we will talk about with some frequency is this: almost all of us have been trained quite well in how to write essays for readers. But sermons are not essays. Sermons are for listeners. There are different ways in which you communicate to a listener *versus* a reader. There are things we will talk about that your sixth grade literature teacher will not like. We will talk about things like one of the most powerful tools preachers have is repetition. Now, if you were writing an essay, your English teacher would say, “Do not say it again. That is redundant.” But in an oral medium we will say, “It is not redundant. It is power.” A listener does not have the ability to back up in the paragraph and read it again. Thus what we do is provide all kinds of cues, signals, and means to grasp the material as it goes by, and that includes unity. We have to have some way to coalesce things, to let people know what the kind of wall of words that is coming at them is all about. Unity is a means to help them find their way, because sermons are for listeners, not readers.



And beyond that, all good communication requires a theme. Even a novel that is many, many pages long somewhere has its theme, what it is basically about. Certainly an essay would reflect that. We would say the temptation for all of us as preachers is to say, “I have so many good things to say, and it is all important and all true,” and just to kind of throw it at people. But it is so much easier to catch a baseball than a handful of sand. They may weigh the same, have equal gravity, but if you do not pull it together, it is very hard to grasp. In fact, what we know as a rule of communication is if the preacher does not supply unity, the listener will. He is required, somehow, to pull the information together. If I were just speaking about different subjects, not spiritual but just generally telling you about a movie I saw last week, I would find some way to not tell you the whole plot but to sum up the storyline. “It was a boy-meets-girl movie,” or “It was a cops-and-robbers,” or “It was a western.” I would have some way of pulling it together before I expected you to deal with all the details. That is what preaching is about as well. As we prepare sermons, we should recognize that we have to have unity for our sake and for the listener’s sake.

Let us talk about the nature of sermon unity—what goes into making it what it should be. You already know one key idea. In expository preaching, the meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon. We want what God says to be what we say. So part of unity is saying, “What is the big idea of the passage? What is it dealing with?” When I identify that, it will also be the big idea of the message, if it reflects the main idea of the text. The Bible says what God says, and I want to say what God says. Thus I need to make sure that its theme is my theme. The meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon.

Second, the meaning of the passage that becomes the message of the sermon is the big idea. Now, some of this is just terminology. In preaching circles, that word, “big idea,” is mentioned over and over again. “What is the big idea?” By that we are looking for the unifying theme of the passage that is also reflected in the message. What is the unifying concept of the sermon? The originator of that terminology, simple as it sounds, is a man named Haddon Robinson, who still teaches at Gordon-Conwell Seminary. Here is Haddon Robinson, who is kind of the beginner of preachers this day in the teaching of preaching. He says it this way, “You determine the big idea by asking this: what is the purpose of the biblical writer here? What is he trying to communicate? What is his theme? What is his idea? What is his concept? This leads us always to original intent.” Now, that is the key terminology. The big idea is seeking to get us to the original intent of God and the author of the text. My goal is not eisegesis, to bring from my experience what the text means. My goal is to have God speak to me through the text. What was the original intent of the author? Now, you recognize that so much of what you do in seminary, exegesis, New Testament studies, Old Testament studies, church history, all of that, is saying, “What did the writer mean to say?” This is because that is what I want to say, if I am being true to his intent and therefore to what God is intending to say.

The definition therefore is this: in expository preaching, unity occurs when the elements of a passage or expository unit (new terminology again) are legitimately shown to support a single, major idea that is the theme of a sermon. Why do homileticians talk about an expository unit rather than just a passage? Are the verses and chapter divisions inspired? Did Luke write those down? No, not at all. Sometimes you will find that the expository unit has to cross over what in our English translations appears to be the passage. Those paragraphs and even verse divisions were not inspired. They were not included originally in the text. Thus it is for us to come with our understanding and say, “Do I need to cross over a verse? Do I need to cross over a chapter?” In fact, you will discover at times that the expository unit, what needs to be preached on, may run over many chapters. If you do not know what happens in Job 40-42, it is very difficult to explain what happens in Job 1 and 2. The expository unit tries to say, “What did God mean to say? And what chunk of Scripture (sometimes very little and sometimes very large) will be

necessary to get the big idea and to actually within context say it?" Thus, in expository preaching, unity occurs when the elements of a passage or expository unit are legitimately shown to support a single, major idea that is the theme of a sermon. Haddon Robinson says it this way, "The big idea of a sermon is a subject and its complements." A subject and its complements. Sometimes the notion of one big idea of a message gets people a little frightened because they think, "You mean I have to talk about this one thing over and over again for 30 minutes?" No, you talk about that one thing in terms of its development. There may be many facets, many subsets, but it is all about one thing. Now you will join the last 20 years of homiletic students in knowing this: a sermon is like a stool. The unifying concept is the seat of this stool. It is all about one thing. So the big idea is the subject, with its complements, the things that support it. We get in danger in preaching when we have a subject and its support is over there somewhere. Or the subject of the main point may not appear to support the subject of the sermon at all. Thus we want to make sure, for unity, that we have a big idea and its complements. That is, all the major parts of the sermon complement the main idea.

Now, what happens when I have to say something to be true to the text, and it does seem to be unrelated? Then I recognize that I have the wrong seat, the wrong subject. I do not yet have a unifying concept that deals appropriately with the subjects of the text. I may have said this text was about God's guidance, but the more I study, the more I say, "You know, there are things in here that really do not reflect much about guidance. That does not appear to be what Paul's main idea was. I will have to change, then, what I said was the big idea as I prepare this message, because it does not adequately reflect the material in the text." And my goal is to say what the text is. Thus one of the tests of whether a sermon has unity and also whether it has truth is if the main idea can be supported by the major components of the text. I test myself by asking, "Do my supporting points support what I said is the main idea?" And I also ask, "Do those supporting points adequately cover what the text is talking about?"

A sermon is about one thing. That is the key concept of sermon unity. The process by which we obtain unity is not a mystery; it is not really hard. We read and digest the passage to determine first, what is the big idea of the writer? I read and digest the passage to determine what the (here the article is important) big idea of the writer is or what themes in the passage have sufficient material to develop the main theme of a sermon.

Believe it or not, I just led you into one of the major debates in the history of homiletics. Do you recognize the debate? The question is this: can a minor theme of a passage be the major theme of a message? Now, there are certainly those in the history of homiletics who say no. But I want you to think about it for a little bit in this way. If you were looking at Luke 15, you would recognize that there is a series of parables there relating to "lostness," right? There is a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. I will guess that at some time in most of your spiritual experiences, you have heard a sermon on your assurance of God's love because God is like the father who received again the prodigal son. If you have sin in your life, if you have been prodigal, you can still have the assurance of God's love because of the nature of that father toward his son. Have you ever heard such a sermon? Would you say that sermon came out of that text? Would you say it is wrong? Most of you would say no. But if you say, "The purpose, the big idea of the total passage of John 15, is to assure prodigal sons of God's love," is that what that is about? No. Who is the passage actually directed to? Who is listening in, and what are they concerned about as Jesus tells these three parables about lost things? What just preceded the parables of "lostness"? What are the Pharisees doing? They are upset because Jesus is eating with the publicans and prostitutes. They are saying, "How can you deal with people like this? If you were really a representative of God, you would know that you are not to deal with people like this." Now Jesus tells parables of "lostness." For those who are sinners, there is the wonderful assurance of how the father

deals with his younger son. But who is really the point of the parable? It is the older son, the older brother. He is upset that the father receives a sinner, the prodigal. Jesus is telling the account to remind the Pharisees that they are being like the elder brother who is upset that God is gracious. Now, is that an appropriate message for a sermon, that you should not be upset that God is gracious toward sinners? Is that an appropriate message? Yes. But many of you also said it would be appropriate to talk about God the Father receiving sinners from this passage. By doing this you recognized that there is a major overarching theme—the wrongness of being upset with God’s grace. And you also recognized that there are sub themes that might be sufficient for a sermon—like God is gracious towards sinners like me and like you.

If you came to the conclusion that only the big idea of a passage and no minor theme is sufficient for a sermon, what would you be required to preach on every time? It is hard to tell. You might have to preach on a whole chapter every time, or you might even have to do a whole book every time. After all, the chapters are only minor points of the bigger book. And by the way, the books are just minor points of the whole message of Scripture. So where we are going is this: it is that word “sufficient.” Minor themes also can be the big idea of a sermon if there is sufficient material. Now this becomes a judgment call. Is there sufficient material in this passage to support what you are saying and particularly for an expositor who will not be importing from other places but only saying what this text means? You are saying, “Within this text, is there sufficient material to say, ‘God is gracious toward sinners?’” Is there sufficient material to say, “You should tithe”? After all, the father provided things here. Well, that may be a minor theme in there, but there is not sufficient material to develop the theme exegetically, not from this passage. So, is there sufficient material to support what I say will be the main theme of the sermon. Therefore, you begin with those two ideas of unity: identifying the big idea of the writer and what themes in the passage have sufficient material to develop the main theme of the sermon.

The second major thing we do for unity is melt down the supporting ideas into a proposition. This is another key term. A proposition, in the history of preaching, is one crisp, clear statement of the big idea—of the, to use your essay language, theme of the message. We then say, “Is there sufficient material here to support what I say is the theme?” That is a proposition. As I state it, is it apparent to me as I have studied it (and hopefully to the listeners after they have heard me) that there is sufficient material in the passage to support that proposition for the message? The mark of success in unity, in developing that proposition, is the 3:00 AM test. The goal is to say, if your spouse or roommate were to bump you out of bed at 3:00 in the morning and say, “Preacher, what is the sermon about?” Can you say it? It has to be a rather crisp, clear statement, because at 3:00 AM you will not be thinking well. “In Psalm 111 and 112, the chiasmic structure of the Hebrew enables the listener to understand that God is not only communicating His character but also showing how they are transferred to man so that His nature is part of their nature, and this is part of His atoning-redemptive process.” That is all true, but it is way too long. “God transfers His nature to us.” That is the same thing. Now, I will prove that statement, establish it, and develop it. I will do all that within the message. But a proposition is to be one crisp, clear statement of what the message is united around. Unity is striving for these things. Unity is striving for a single thrust *versus* multiple thoughts. One sermon really cannot be about the cause of Absalom’s sin, the cure for alcohol addiction, and the case for infant baptism. Now, notice the great alliteration! But it is still way too broad for it to be united around anything.

Homileticians have a cute way of reminding us how we will do this: TMT/ITK/TMT/TMT. What does that stand for? “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Unity, sermonic unity in a message, strives very hard for that ethic. Your greatest threat is your knowledge of the passage. You will know so much. As I mentioned earlier, John Stott says, “The greatest torture of any preacher is throwing away 90% of what he knows about a passage to preach on it.” The people who listen to us in local

churches, as you go out and start preaching, kind of smile when they talk about the “seminary sermon.” What do they mean? The speaker included everything he ever heard in systematics class and said it as fast as he could to get it all in. He did this rather than recognizing, “I only have this much time, but God’s people have this week, and next week, and the next week. This week we will talk about this. We will deal with this theme that the Scripture addresses sufficiently so that they will see this is what this passage is about. And if it is too much material, I need to deal with a smaller bit of the passage.

What is the purpose of the main theme? What are we trying to get to when we talk about the big idea the passage is about? We are trying to get to a purpose that I will identify as the fallen condition focus. When we identify that big idea and ask why it is here, we do not really have to guess why it is here. The Scripture itself is telling us the purpose of every passage. If evangelicals would not make John 3:16 their only motto verse, we would say the other major motto verse of evangelicals is 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, which says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” In the King James Version, the last phrase is “so that the man of God may perfectly, thoroughly equipped unto every good work.” It is that word “perfect” we stumble on. It is actually the Greek word *makarios*, which means “complete.” All Scripture is given for these various reasons, teaching, rebuke, correction...to complete us. Now, if Scripture is given to complete us, what does that necessarily say about us? We are incomplete. Apart from what God provides, we are incomplete. We are fallen creatures. We have holes in us that the Scripture is designed to fill by telling us of the work of God.

Identifying fallenness, what is wrong, is what Lutheran homileticians call the burden of the text. What is wrong that God must address with His redemptive work in order for us to be whole or complete before Him? Our fallen nature requires Scripture’s completion. And all of Scripture has this purpose of completing us. Thus every passage has a fallen condition focus, what I will simply call the FCF. The purpose of the text is not simply to give you information for the test tomorrow. The goal of the passage is not just so that you will go home and have more knowledge. The purpose of the text is to deal with us as fallen creatures in our fallen condition with the knowledge of what God can do about that. Some aspect of our fallenness is being addressed. Our fallen condition is the purpose that is beaconing behind the words. It is the purpose that is even beaconing behind the information. It is the answer to the why question. I see what question here, but why is it here? Why did the Holy Spirit require a biblical writer to write this down? If it is not just so that we will be able to answer right questions on the test, what is the purpose? What is the burden of the text?

Let me tell you why that is so important. I hope you feel a little of the weight of it right now. When you come to seminary or learn from seminary classes, you have the wonderful privilege of beginning to see the Scripture in greater detail, with more knowledge, and through greater tools you are provided with than virtually any other person. That is a great gift. That is a wonderful privilege. But if you are not careful, you can get caught into just displaying the joy of your privilege instead of the reason you have been given it. When people look for the common denominators of great preaching, that is a difficult thing to do. You could go to the seminary library and look at the multiple volumes of 20 centuries of great preaching. If you were to say, “What is common among all these sermons?” I will tell you, you will struggle to find a common denominator. They are so different, given the era. It could be the type of preaching that reflects ancient Greek rhetoric, being highly ornate, very doctrinally oriented, and not dealing much with the text explicitly. It might be Puritan preaching, again dealing with the text but typically giving a key verse to get a thought out of it, and then going to many different passages to develop the doctrine in that text. Or, from the time of John Broadus, we have expository preaching as we know it today, which says, “Look at the text and explain what it means on the basis of the biblical writer who wrote it, not going to all those other places until you have proven the idea first.” Thus you will find

ornate preaching, Puritan preaching, expository preaching—many different kinds of preaching. What is the common denominator of great preaching? Who made the choice and why? The common denominator of all great preaching is that it gives hope, not that it gives information, although all preaching gives information to some extent. The common denominator of all great preaching is that it uses the information in the text to give hope. Why are we dealing with fallenness? So that I will recognize that “there is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man.” What you are struggling with, the people in the Bible were struggling with. And God gave them aid. So I will tell you what they were struggling with, what the burden of the text is, so that when you also struggle with something you will know how to deal with it, with the divine solution that God provides here. Romans 15:4 says, “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope.”

Here is the definition of the FCF: the FCF is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers (us) share with those for or by whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage to manifest God’s glory in His people. What are we doing? We are starting the message, thinking of it redemptively, by saying, “As I look at this text, what is the burden of the text and what is the hope of God?” Why is it here? If I do not ask that question, I will get into sermons that are merely lectures on topics. “I will talk to you today about justification by faith alone.” Well, that is very interesting. “And I can tell you all the places in Scripture where justification is shown to be by faith alone and how God expressed it...” That is all great information. Why do I need to hear that? Why does the mass of people even in our churches base their justification on their sanctification instead of on faith in what He has done? What is the burden of the text? What becomes the problem if I think I am okay with God based on how I am doing? Then honesty will always take me to an understanding that I have no assurance before God on that basis. Why did the Holy Spirit write this down? What was the burden of the text? Why did it have to be there, and what now is the hope that God is providing? The FCF takes us beyond the mere factual questions to the redemptive answers by saying, “Here is the problem that is human: you have holes in you. By the way, you cannot fix it. But God can.” By dealing with fallenness, true fallenness, I am forced to deal with the divine solution.

What are the implications of the FCF? First, we should never preach on a text until we have determined why the Holy Spirit put it there. The great temptation will be to preach on what you know, the facts, rather than going beyond that to say, “Why are these details here?” We will say, “Until I have gone on to the why questions, I am not ready to preach.” That is the second implication. Until we have determined an FCF of a text, we do not know what it is about, even if we know many true facts about it. If we do not ask the why question, we do not really know what it is about. One very good way to find out if you are really dealing with the burden of the text, justification by faith alone, God’s sovereignty, and the like, is, after you have answered the questions of what the text is about, then you can go through the “who” door. All right, God is sovereign, He knows about tomorrow. That is very interesting. Who needs to hear that? Now you are pastoring. Now you are not only lecturing. You are saying, “What is the burden of the text?” Think pastorally for moment. Who needs to know that God knows tomorrow? Are any of you struggling to find a job right now? Do you know young people who are still worried about their college choice for next year who have no idea where to go? For whom is it important to know that God knows? The One who loves you and gave His Son for you, He knows tomorrow. Who needs to hear that? When you think of the “who” question, you will get to the “why” answer—to deal with people like me. I look at the text and ask, “What is its burden?” This enables me to preach truly as God intended.

How do I determine the FCF? Here is a three-step process of determining the FCF. First, ask, “What does this text say?” That is kind of the bare information question. What does the text say? In classic Haddon Robinson language, it is, “What is the big idea here?” What does the text say, what is the big

idea here? Now, that is a very important step. What does this text say, what is going on here? That is necessary and important and requires all your knowledge, skills, and tools that you are being given at seminary. What does the text say? For me the sad thing is, I think, many, many preachers in this culture end their sermon preparation when they have ended the answer to that question. “What does this text say? I will give you the information. And because I was being true and faithful, exegeting the text, I think I have preached.” I will keep pressing you on and say, “Why did you sit down in church to listen to that man? Just so you would get more facts? What were you really expecting?”

A second thing to do to determine the FCF is this: do not only ask, “What does the text say?” but also ask, “What concern or concerns did the text address?” That is looking at its original context. What was going on in Philippi that wrote, “I plead with Euodia and Syntyche to be at peace...”? Was it to have us be able to pronounce Euodia and Syntyche sometime in the future? No. Why did he write that? What was going on then that he needed to write? What was the burden of that time? What concern or concerns required the writing of the text in its context?

Then number three is what I think takes a lecture into being a sermon. It is answering the question, “What do we share in common with those for or about whom this was written, or the one by whom this was written?” When David says, “My tears have been my drink all the night long,” he is the one who wrote that text. Has anyone here ever cried in the night? David did. He is like me in some way. Do not just see that he was going through a hard time. Ask, “How are we like him?” Why did the Spirit record his experience for me? How are we like him?

I hope you are getting the big hint here. The hint is this: the mutual condition, what we talked about in the FCF, finding out how what is going on in the text is like my condition, is the key to the most powerful and poignant preaching—identifying the mutual condition of the original audience and us. This is not just describing the text, although that is important and true. But how is that group of people, the one who wrote that, or the one about whom it was written, like me? What mutual condition do we share, that I may now know that as God treated them, as God rescued them, so He can redeem, rescue, or redeem me? Another key hint is this: it is not just the mutual condition that makes powerful preaching, but the more particular you make the FCF, typically the more powerful the sermon will be. This is again a difference between an essay and a sermon. For an essay you typically write a large principle. “Today, I will talk about the problem of sin in the world.” Great, but what does that have to do with me? Typically, the more personal and particular you make the FCF, the more powerful the sermon is. “Today we will talk about how you can be faithful when your boss is a sinner.” Is there anyone in Scripture who had to be faithful even though his superiors were pagan? That subject is addressed in numerous places. I have to become much more particular about what the FCF is in order to deal with it in general.

A simple rubric of preaching is if you try to preach to everyone, you really speak to no one. If you try to speak to everyone, with universal principles that apply to all people in all places, you actually speak to no one. It is too abstract. But if you will speak to just one, you speak to everyone. “There is no temptation that has taken you but such as is common to man.” If you will actually deal with an individual facing a common human dilemma, everyone will listen in. If I talk about an Asian person in a nursing home who is not visited anymore by family or friends but has found fellowship with God, everyone will listen. None of the people in my congregation are in nursing homes. But do any of them know loneliness? Do any of them know what it is like to be abandoned by family and friends and to need to find God as the One who is a friend? If you speak of one clearly who has a human condition, a fallenness, everyone knows what you are talking about. And they will listen in because you have become pastoral in your particular topic and not just lecturing about universals. Now, there is a balance here. To find that mutual human condition, you have to understand the human condition. And you are

actually personifying it when you become particular. But that mutual human condition has to have the pastoral instincts to say it does apply to enough people. But I will talk about it in particular terms.

It has been asked, am I saying that when we preach we should think of particular people in our congregation who are going through situations or conditions that this text would be applicable to, and to actually think of those people as we prepare? Then I would be going along thinking, “It would be really good for Mary and Sue to hear this.” The answer is I am definitely saying that. Let me tell you where we will go in a few weeks. My goal when I am pastoring as I preach is to think, “Who needs to hear this?” and to think of and prepare even my word choice and structure for specific people, to minister to these people God has put in my context. I should not preach to people somewhere else, but I should preach to these people. Therefore I will think of these people in their actual contexts. But I will never name them. I will speak of their situations, but I will not identify them. If I am preaching to a congregation made up of many, many college students, I will purposely talk about some of the temptations I know are on college campuses. Now, if I were in a rural farm district with mostly older people, I would not talk about college temptations to that group of people. I may talk about how the economy is destroying the farm families, young people having to move away, wondering if they will even be here next year, and God’s assurance to them. I may talk about overcoming the temptation to think, “There is no hope because I do not know what is going to happen.” This may speak to people in a rural setting versus people in a college setting. They may be thinking, “There is no reason to resist, because God does not know what I am doing.” What God knows is still the subject, but I will definitely deal with that subject in terms of the fallenness of people. This is the universal principle that we will apply to specific situations God has put in front of us. But I will not be able to do that well if I have not said what the specific situation is that is here in the text, first. What was David dealing with? What are the principles of his situation that God’s redeeming work is dealing with? The sermon is most apt to deal with the text when even the applications I give are most close to the situation of the text.

Here is another little preaching rubric: you apply what you explain. What you have explained the text is about is what you apply. When people really get upset with you is when you begin to apply what you have not explained—or especially if you have not proven the text says that. That is when you really get into trouble. Someone has raised the problem of the preacher trying to deal with his own problems in the pulpit. This is a balance, is it not? Sometimes the sermons that are most powerful are when you are preaching to yourself, when you know your struggles and you know you have to deal with this. But if the pulpit becomes the place where you always deal with yourself and your concerns, two things begin to happen. First, you rob people of the whole counsel of God. You are just dealing with you rather than with the true subjects of the text. This, by the way, is one of the reasons we do consecutive preaching. We move through a book so that I have to deal with more themes than just those that come to my mind. The other thing that can happen if the preacher too frequently only deals with his problems is that the people stop thinking the text applies to them. It seems he is just doing self-therapy in the pulpit. “He is talking on that subject again? Oh, that is just what he is struggling with.” Thus you end up removing the Scriptures from the people.

Now, this is always a balance. Over and over again we will talk about pastoral prudence. On the other hand, if the preacher never identifies with the way others are struggling, that is harmful as well. Others have written, “If the preacher is the only one in the congregation who does not recognize there is a storm outside, then again the preacher is not able to minister.” There is redemptive transparency. I have to, from time to time, say, “We, me and you—we struggle with this. And God helps us all.” Remember? “All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned each to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Even the prophet is willing to be transparent at times. But if the pulpit becomes

what I think of as the “sympathy bench,” with the pastor saying, “Feel sorry for me, I am struggling so much,” that is not redemptive transparency. That is selfish transparency.

Let us keep going. I want to make sure one more thing about the FCF is clear to you. The FCF, remember, is the mutual human condition we share with those in the text. And I have used that word “burden” a lot. So I hope you recognize that the FCF is always something that is wrong, something that is negative. But I want you to hear this: it is not always a sin. What are legitimate subjects a sermon can address? Can a sermon address the subject of dishonesty? Sure. Can it address the subject of unfaithfulness? Sure. Can it address the subject of rebellion? Sure. The common denominator of all these subjects is that they are all sins. Can a sermon address the subject of grief? Yes. Is grief always a sin? No. What is it? It is a consequence of being a fallen creature in a fallen world. That is why it is not the sin condition focus (SCF). It is the fallen condition focus. Sermons can certainly deal with sins, and many, many times they should, but not always. Sometimes people’s hurting and brokenness, which has to do with Hurricane Ivan, for instance, and not with someone’s individual sin, is a legitimate subject of a sermon. Will there be pastors who will have heavy, pastoral, biblical work to do in areas torn apart by natural disasters? You know there will. And for them to say something like, “You are sinners,” will not be the best subject for those sermons. It may be better to say, “It seems hopeless, but God is here. He is sovereign, He is still on His throne, and you can have faith in Him.” Thus an FCF can be sin, but it does not always mean sin. It is important that you recognize that.

Now, when the Bible and sermon identify an FCF, a burden of the text, we have to ask the question, “Why is it doing that? Why are the passage and the message identifying something wrong?” The answer is, of course, so that we will apply the truth of the Scripture to that problem. This, of course, is called application. Dr. Rayburn was the founding president at Covenant Seminary and taught this course for many years. Dr. Rayburn had been an Air Force colonel, and even as a seminary president he kind of kept that bearing and demeanor. He was someone we all respected and feared a little bit. He used his bearing, because he loved us, in very remarkable ways at some points. At this point in this course he would do this. He would say a little gruffly, “Gentlemen, I do not care where you go as a preacher. I do not care how big the church. I do not care how well they say you have preached. Wherever you go in the world, whatever you preach, at the end of your sermon I want you to see me sitting on the back row. I have a frown on my face, my arms are crossed. And as you are leaving the sanctuary after your wonderful sermon, I have a question for you: ‘So what? So what? Oh, so the Israelites went into the Promised Land. So what? So Paul was shipwrecked. So what?’” What was he driving at? What does this have to do with me? This was all true information, maybe even dealing with problems. But what does this have to do with me? When we preach, we are not merely giving information. We preach for transformation.

The biblical instruction of this is plentiful. We can again go back to that “motto verse” in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” There is a reason that doctrine, reproof, and correction are given. It is so that we would live according to the doctrine, reproof, and correction. There is application expected. As Presbyterians, it is often very hard to get a rise out of a congregation. But even Presbyterians have an “Amen” verse. Did you know that? For Presbyterians, the “Amen” verse is Titus 2:1. You can almost always get an “Amen” out of Presbyterians with this one: “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.” Amen? “Amen.” See, even Presbyterians will say “Amen” to that one. “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.” But how does this continue? What is in accord with sound doctrine that Titus is told he must teach? Titus 2:2-6 continues, “Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way



they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled.” What is in accord with sound doctrine that he must teach? How people are to live in accord with sound doctrine. This is application. This is even the pattern of the epistles. All the epistles of the apostle Paul begin with a salutation, some greeting. Then he gives much doctrinal instruction. Then how do the letters end? With practical application. There are implications of what you know. He tells Titus, as he says in other places, “This you must teach for the purpose of people knowing how to live.” That is application.

What are the implications of this for us? Simply this: preaching is to transform as well as inform. The father of expository preaching as we know it, John Broadus, dealt with the liberalism that was coming into the church in this culture from Europe. Thus he said, “We must make sure we are saying what the Bible says.” The father of expository preaching said, “So what is the main thing to be done in preaching?” His answer will surprise you. You would think that the father of expository preaching would say, “The main thing to be done is to explain the text.” But he did not. Guess what the father of expository preaching said was the main thing to be done? He said application. He said this because he recognized the temptation to become simply dispensers of information and forget what the purpose of the text is. The purpose is to bring the power of God into the lives of God’s people so they will live according to His ways.

The second implication is that preaching will always include two things: what is true and what to do about it. It is not just one or the other. Preaching that is just what is true is abstraction. Preaching that is just what you should do is arrogance. Preaching what is true and what to do about it is ministry. Preach what is true and what to do about it. What we were doing with that FCF earlier was creating a longing for the Word. Remember, “As the deer pants for the water so my soul thirsts for you.” The FCF builds that so we can then say, “And here is what God has called you to thirst for: His will, Word, and ways.”

What are the consequences of not doing application? A message is pre-sermon until its ideas and components are applied to an FCF. You can say many true things in a pre-sermon, like “God is good. God is loving. God is kind. God is patient.” This is all good information, but it is not a sermon until you have applied those aspects to an FCF, to someone who is in fear and needs to know that God is good, loving, kind, and patient. When you take the truth and apply it to that mutual human condition, that is when you have a sermon. Pre-sermons only describe the text. Sermons apply the text to an FCF. Some years ago there was a professor who came to lecture for us. He was an expert in Hittite-ology, the archaeology of the Hittites. We listened with rapt attention for about three days to his lectures. Then one student dared to ask at the end of those lectures, “What do these Hittites have to do with the Hittites of the Bible?” And the professor said, “Oh, these are not the Hittites of the Bible.” And we all said (to ourselves), “Then why have we been sitting here all this time, if this has nothing to do with us?” Now, we did not just leave perplexed. We left mad. If all you do is dispense information, your people will not leave with an appreciative, “Oh, that was interesting.” They will leave hurt and mad. “I came to be ministered to. Why did you not apply this to my life?” We are not ministers of information alone. We are ministers of transformation. We speak the Word of God to give to His people in their fallen condition. When we approach the Scriptures that way, God not only blesses, but He also wonderfully heals His people through the ministry He gives us. We will talk about many of the specifics as we continue, but these are the early things. Every sermon, to be called a sermon, requires unity, purpose, and application.

## **Text Selection and Interpretation**

As we are beginning today, let us review some major points from the last few lessons. A sermon should be about one thing. What is the one thing? A subject and its complements. What is the big idea of a sermon? The main idea of a passage applied to a fallen condition focus (FCF). Somebody was asking me just before we began if there is only one possible FCF for a given passage. No. The FCF is the way we identify and speak about the burden of the passage, but there may be many ways of wording it, and there may be many subsets within the main idea. So it is the main idea of a passage applied to an FCF rather than the FCF of a given passage.

How does one develop an FCF? You are identifying the burden of a message. Are all FCF's sins? No. It may be the burden of the text that is a sin, a wrong that is being corrected, or it may be an aspect of our fallen condition, like grief or uncertainty, that is not a sin. But always it is part of our fallen condition that God is addressing. So it is identifying the burden of the message—it may be a sin or it may not be.

What are indications that a message is pre-sermon? It is truth without application. It is just information. Information without application yields frustration. We are not ministers of information alone; we are ministers of transformation. So, a message is pre-sermon if it is truth without application. When you are listening to other pastors to learn from them, here are some helpful things to keep in mind. How are they portraying *logos* to you? Now again, what is *logos*? It is the verbal content, and it includes the logic. It is not just the words themselves; it is the meaning of the words being presented in a logical form. How is *logos* being presented to you by the preacher? What things do preachers do that communicate *logos*? Okay, the outline, the points themselves, are an organizational scheme. That is one way. So, organization is one dimension of *logos*. Is body language *logos*? Surely if the manner contradicts the message we will hear the manner as the message. Does that make sense? So, certainly body language has something to do with communicating content. That is, verbal content is not just the words coming out of the mouth. The way they are being expressed is also part of the verbal content. It is not just what is said but how it is said that is the verbal content. Now, the phrase, “how it is said,” what do we usually think of that most applying to? If not *logos*, what? *Pathos*. How it is said. But these are not ironclad categories. In fact, we will begin to see more and more how much they blend. *Logos* you know is the words said and even things like, “Can I hear what is being said?” It includes the organization, “How am I getting the verbal content?”

How is *pathos* communicated to you? We already said body language may be one way. What are other ways that *pathos* is communicated to you? The emotions—how do we communicate emotions to one another? By gestures, tone of voice, and facial expression. This is what the speech communicators call facial animation. When we are very serious, particularly men in this society, our faces tend to freeze. For example, I may say, “I am really happy about this,” but I am not smiling. The best way to get facial animation is to actually smile. If you plant a smile, your face will start moving. When we are very serious, we often get very flat faced. So, tone of voice, gesture (manner reflecting message, manner being consistent to the message), and facial expression.

Now, how do we present, and how do the preachers you are listening to communicate *ethos* to you? This is the tough one and yet the most important one. How do preachers communicate *ethos*? *Ethos* has two components: credibility and compassion (C and C). So, if I speak of personal experience, what does that do to either credibility or compassion? It is the credibility of “I know what you are living through.” That is part of *ethos*. What about compassion? Can personal experience relate compassion? If my personal experience is making fun of other people, it is not going to relate compassion. But if it is showing

empathy, sympathy, and concern for others, personal experience can be part of *ethos*. What else goes into communicating *ethos*? Transparency (we will talk a little later about redemptive transparency). This means not simply saying, “Feel sorry for me,” but, “I know what you are going through, and God has provided a help.” What else helps with *ethos*? Credibility and compassion. What communicates credibility? Part of it is the way the pastor lives his life. That is not even what happens in the pulpit, is it? Your impression of a preacher is largely based on knowing him outside the pulpit or knowing what he brings into the sermon from outside the pulpit. That is why we have to think that preaching is not just words. It is life presenting words. “Truth poured through personality” is Philip Brooks’ famous statement. *Ethos* is your awareness or somehow what is projected through your life, not just what you are saying at the time. What does organization do for credibility? If someone is not organized, he is not credible. He does not appear to know what he is talking about, or worse, he does not appear to care whether you are able to understand it. He does not seem to care about his listeners if he is not organized. That surprises people usually. I think of organization as just being a logical thing I have to go through. But it is actually one of the primary means by which we communicate care for the listeners.

Thus, now we will tie the categories together. Intellectual integrity can certainly be part of *logos*—does the argument hold water? But it is also part of *ethos*—is this logical, is it embracing what you know would be questions a listener would have? Or are you ignoring the questions, are you ignoring the big issues? Are you speaking about what you want to know but ignoring what everybody knows is the big elephant in the room, the hard questions? Have you really engaged with intellectual integrity what people know is going on?

Now, I am not going to continue going down the path, but I want to get you ready because you have seen two things happen, I hope. The categories start to blend, each kind of depends on the others. *Pathos* is part of *logos*, *logos* is part of *pathos*, *logos* is part of *ethos*, *ethos* is part of *logos*. The second thing you start to realize, even as you are evaluating other preachers, is that you are not evaluating only what happens in the pulpit. *Ethos* takes you to a wider world. Because *ethos* is connected to all those other things, it becomes the reason why we cannot say, “I will be a great preacher if they just give me 40 hours a week in the office to develop these great masterpiece sermons.” That would not be a very great preaching ministry. If it is not life on life, the words do not mean very much. Let us pray, and we will go into today’s lesson.

*Father, You beautifully unfold Your Word in our task in so many ways, reminding us how we live is part of what we say and yet reminding us at the same time that Your Spirit has given us what to say so that we are not dependent on our authority or our thoughts. And yet Father, we know we must have this because our thoughts are sometimes a great challenge. We recognize for our nation right now there is a major storm bearing down on the southern states. As we struggle in thought with this, at one point we recognize it is evidence of Your power and sovereignty, and at the same time we recognize that people will be hurt, and we have trouble reconciling this to our understanding of You. At one level we can logically talk about it being a fallen world, the consequence of sin ravishing in so many ways. But ultimately we will still at times struggle to make sense of how it goes on and what its purpose could be. Your ways are beyond ours. And Father, if we only relied on our logic for the interpretation of our circumstances, we would be at a loss. But You have shown us something else. Beyond our circumstances You have shown us Your character. Through the work of Jesus Christ, we have seen a love that is undeniable and eternal. It is working its purposes out in ways that we in the moment might say looked wrong. Father, by so displaying Your character to us even on this day, would You hold our hearts close to Your own. Do this that not only would we be assured of all that You are doing for our good, but that we might also be able to help others, too. Grant us a great vision of Your Son, that we might be*

*adequate heralds of the mercy that is in Him. We ask for Your blessing even as we prepare for this day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Today we will talk about learning some basic tools and rules for both selecting and interpreting text. If we are going to be preaching from the Bible, ultimately we have to select some texts and then interpret them. Now, here is a particular text that was interpreted. G. Campbell Morgan, one of the great preachers from the last century, did not preach this sermon, but he talked about once hearing it. It was a sermon based on 2 Samuel 9:13. Here is the text: "And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table, and he was crippled in both feet." This is the text about Mephibosheth, taken to David's table even though Mephibosheth was lame. The preacher began the sermon this way, "My brethren, we see here tonight first, the doctrine of human depravity: Mephibosheth was lame. Second, we see the doctrine of total depravity: he was lame in both feet." (You are supposed to chuckle at this point). "Third, we see the doctrine of justification, for he dwelt in Jerusalem. Fourth, we see the doctrine of adoption because he ate at the king's table. And fifth, we see the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints because he ate at the king's table continually." Is that what the text means? Now we must say, somewhere in the Bible those things are said. But this is classic eisegesis: importing upon the text what the text does not mean. Now somewhere the Bible does say those things, but it is not what this text says. The goal of expository preaching is to say what God says, to interpret the text correctly.

To do that we need to have certain tools available to us. I want to talk to you first about some basic tools for Bible study. What are some basic tools for Bible study? The basic tool that I would encourage you to have in your library available to you as you prepare your studies is a good study Bible. A study Bible is one that does not merely have the text of Scripture but information about the text. This information can be found at the beginnings of chapters, in footnotes, textual commentary, indices, maps, and all kinds of things that go in a study Bible. There is much information about the text in a study Bible. If you open up to the book of Philippians, it will tell you it was written by Paul. It will tell you the year it was written. It will tell you where Paul was when he wrote, which is away from Philippi. It will tell you who the Philippians were, what their town was like, what they were struggling with, and what was going on in the church.

Now, for this information I do not have to go to many commentaries, not yet. This is basic information that will be in virtually any good study Bible. The one I have here is the *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible*, which has most of the notes and commentary put together by Reformed and evangelical scholars. It uses the text of the New International Version (NIV). Many of you will be using the NIV, or your churches do. The *New Geneva Study Bible* originally had these notes, and it was in the New King James Version. The notes for the new Reformation Study Bible were originally designed for the NIV. But Zondervan at that point did not release the copyright for the use of those notes with the NIV. So they were attached to the New King James Version. Some years later, people got together and said, "You know, we still have these notes for the NIV." At that point, rights were obtained, and they were attached to the NIV study bible. Thus, while there are some editorial differences, the study notes for both the New King James and the NIV study bible are pretty much the same. That is very helpful.

Other commonly used study Bibles are the NIV, which is Zondervan's own study Bible. If you only have so much money to spend on a study Bible, this one gives you lots of information at your fingertips right with the text. And when you are saying, "Am I really off base here in where I am going," usually the notes at the bottom of the page will give you a lot of information of whether you are off base in your initial interpretation. They are not exhaustive! They are not like an extensive commentary. But they give you good hints and a good sketch of most of the information that will be background that you will need for almost any text. The Ryrie Study Bible is used much in the United States. The theological

perspective of the Ryrie Study Bible is dispensational. It is evangelical and Bible believing, but it is dispensational. The HarperCollins Study Bible is also much used in the United States. Its theological perspective is liberal critical. So it would not accept the inerrancy of Scripture, and much of the notes will reflect that. It has much good scholarship, in terms of intellectual integration and credibility. But it does not, in our view, have an accurate view or a truthful understanding of what the Scriptures say. A study Bible is certainly going to be something you will want on your shelf that will be very, very helpful. This is probably the first tool that most preachers refer to when they are preparing a sermon. They will look in their study Bible and get perspective that way.

The second most used tool is a concordance. Looking at a text, how do you use a concordance? What do you do with the text when you are looking at a concordance? Why would you use it? You would use it for a word study. You might say, “Here is this word—I wonder where else that is used. I wonder how it is used in other places in the Bible.” You begin to do a word study through the use of a concordance. If you are a preacher and a scholar, that is what you say you use a concordance for—for looking at how a word is used elsewhere in the Bible. But how do most of us use concordances? What do we do? Particularly our generation. We have a Scripture in our mind, but we cannot remember where it is in the Bible. And so what do we do? We look up the word, and we find the text.

Now two of the main English versions of concordances, available up to this generation, are Young’s and Strong’s. I am using a Young’s. They are both dependable and Bible believing in their approach, but they have differences. Young’s groups words according to their original language root. If you look up the word “love,” it will group all of the references to love that come from the Greek *agape*. Then it will also group all the references to love that come from the Greek *filio*. It will group them according to their original language root. Strong’s groups them according to their English usage. So it will put all the love words together, right in a row. It does not take care to say, “This usage is from this Greek word for love, and that is from another Greek word for love.” So people who have had some training in the original language tend to prefer Young’s. People who are English based only typically prefer Strong’s. Now, Strong’s has a way of compensating for the fact that it does not group itself according to the original language roots. That is the number system. Next to the English word, depending on what edition of Strong’s you have, it might have the Greek word listed by it. But the modern versions will have a numbering system after the word. That numbering system is connected to a number of resources that you can buy. You can then figure out what the Greek root of a word is, where that word is used elsewhere, etc. The numbering system will actually take you to the dictionary references of those words in *Vine’s New Testament Word Dictionary*. So, you can read a lot about the Greek background of those words. Again, when you have a little of original language background, Young’s tends to be more efficient. It will tell you the original language background and group the words according to that. But Strong’s gives you the same ability to work through an English based system by using their numbering system.

Now, that is mostly what the last generation would have depended on. There is something else going on today, which has nothing to do with those hard-bound books. Many of you will use you computers as concordances. You will use something like the concordance for the English Standard Version (ESV) that is computerized. Some of you will use software like Logos, which is probably the most popular. Some of you will use more technical things like Gramcord, which, by the way, is quite expensive. There are ways to use computer searches. I would guess I now do most of my word searches on the computer. For the first 15 or 20 years of my ministry, I used my Young’s, but I hardly ever use it anymore. It gathers dust on my shelf. Now, almost always, I do computer searches and use computer concordances. I use Gramcord, but that is because the seminary owns it. I recognize it is quite expensive. My guess is

most of you will use either Bible Works or Logos. Some of these companies come and go. I think the premier one that has lasted has been Logos. Most seminarians use that.

Beyond concordances, the next thing that is very common for use is a topical Bible. A concordance allows you to search the Bible for word use, where else in the Bible that word appears. A topical Bible allows you to search for where else a topic appears in the Bible. I have a *Nave's Topical Bible*. If I look up "kingdom" in it, it will tell me the various places that the topic of kingdom is addressed in the Bible. This is an exhaustive Nave's, by the way. It does not just list the reference, but it actually gives me all the verses that are in that reference. For me, that is a very fast way to study. If I am giving a lesson on intercessory prayer, I can look up "prayer, subset intercessory," and the Nave's gives me most of the major places in the Bible that intercessory prayer appears. I can do a quick study of that by just going through a topical Bible. Nave's is the most used one in the English language. I do not know that there is a good computer program that does this yet, that actually deals topically with such issues.

Similar to Nave's, but somewhat different, is the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible*. It deals with a topic as it appears in the biblical text. If you are going through Genesis and you come across something about the curse, the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* will take you to the next place in the Bible where something about the curse appears. As you keep turning, it keeps referencing you further. It just links the chain of that topic through the Bible. When you get all the way to the back of the *Thompson Chain Reference*, it will list all together what that chain has been. It will give you a fairly extensive study of some of those things at the back when it links the chain together and says, "This is where "kingdom" appears..." and lists them all together. The *Thompson Chain Reference* is more methodical than Nave's, but Nave's, by far, is the more abbreviated and quick way of doing it. But what I do sometimes, and I guess that you will do it too, is, in studying a text I come across something that I did not even recognize was chained somewhere. And the *Thompson Chain Reference* tells you, "By the way, this is also over here." Well, I better look there and see what is going on there, too. It leads you forward into that kind of study. So the study tools we have covered so far are study Bibles, concordances, and topical Bibles. These are all various ways we can study a text.

Now, a fourth way we can study a text is by looking at various translations. We look at the text we are studying, and we begin to look at it in various translations. I am not asking you to do this, but this is actually a little book that has about the New Testament in 26 translations. So you can compare 26 translations in the New Testament. I do not have an Old Testament version—I cannot imagine how big such a book would be. This is in very little type, and it gives me 26 translations that I can compare as I am going through the New Testament. I hardly ever do it, as it is overwhelming. But there are certain translations that I will almost always compare. Most of the churches in which I preach these days are using NIV. Because of that, most of the time I prepare my sermons using the NIV. Sometimes, however, I go to churches that still use the King James Version. So, if I am going and I know that I will be in a church that uses King James, I will certainly compare those translations. The ESV is kind of working its way into the evangelical and Reformed world. My sense is that it is more concentrated in seminary use right now than it is in wide church use. However, these days, if I am preparing something in the NIV, I almost always check it in the ESV. I almost always do that these days because I recognize that enough people may be looking at the ESV that they will be saying, "Wait, that is not what my Bible says." I want to be able to deal with that in the sermon. But that is not the main reason I compare translations. The main reason I compare translations is so that I will begin to be able to pinpoint very precisely where there are issues in the text. I will be able to note the different places where this translation kind of went that way and this translation kind of went the other way.

A student brought to me a question yesterday as we were working on a sermon together. He said, "In the NIV it says, 'As Jesus was walking on the water, he passed by the disciples.' In the ESV it says, 'He intended to pass by the disciples.' There may be something really going on there; is it just incidental passing by? Or did he purposely intend to pass by?" If I see that strong a difference, I know I will have to look it up in the Greek (or Hebrew for the Old Testament). I know that I have to find out what is going on here. There is a significant enough difference in the translations that it draws my attention. That is what I call "pinpoint exegesis." Exegesis is where we use the original language to determine what a text means. There are times when I love to dig into a text and be able to translate the whole thing and work it through, and that is great. But there are times when I cannot do that. And it is when I compare translations that I learn where it is that I have to spend my exegetical nickels. I say, "I can really tell there is an issue here. I better research so I know what I am talking about." Comparing translations helps me do that.

As you think about various translations, I want to caution you about what I consider to be sometimes senseless and unnecessary debates. If you were trained in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, if you did lots of inductive Bible studies on college campuses, what translation did you typically use? You probably used the New American Standard Bible (NAS). Why? It is the most literal of the translations. Kind of in lockstep, it follows the Greek and Hebrew as much as it can, even in word order. So it is the most literal of the translations. And you must say, "That is very helpful when you are doing inductive Bible study and trying to do a very close reading of the text." Now, while that is very helpful for Bible students, for whom is it sometimes difficult to read? For the average person in the pew. Now what did we just say? It has got a great strength; it is probably the most literal of the translations. But what is its weakness? Sometimes its language is very wooden and not easy to follow. They do not recognize that no matter where you translate something you are going to have to do some certain idiomatic translations and change. One of the idioms in Hebrew for a man getting angry is to say, "His nose glows." Now, if I just translated it, "His nose glows," what will everybody with an English Bible do? They will say, "What? Has he got a cold? His nose glows?" So what am I going to do? I take that literal translation and put it in my idiom. I will say, "He got angry. He got very mad." I will put it in an English idiom to make sense of it. Now, the New American Standard (NAS) will do that too. But the Bible that takes the most care, is the most concerned to look at the original translation and put it in the dynamic equivalence of how we speak, is the NIV. The NIV took great care to get dynamic equivalence. The strength of this is that it is very readable. As I recall, they were going for a fourth grade reading level, so that fourth graders would be able to read it. That is its great strength. What then becomes its weakness? Dynamic equivalence is not always very literal. I have all these other study tools so that I know precisely what is being said, and, if I feel the dynamic equivalence needs to be elaborated on, I can do that.

The ESV is kind of in between the NAS and the NIV. The ESV is not an original translation. There was a translation that preceded it. Do you know what that translation was? It was the Revised Standard Version (RSV). The RSV was translated by liberal scholars who were trying to update the King James. The great advantage of the King James in English culture is that, because it has been around for so many years, it is the version of the Bible that most people are familiar with. What the RSV tried to do was to update the King James and keep that majesty of language, almost the poetry of it. The trouble was, they were liberal scholars, and they put in liberal scholarship at times. Some of the classic places where this happened are passages like Isaiah 7:14. Here they did not say that a virgin would be with child. Instead of "virgin," they said "a young girl." They would not affirm the virgin birth prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. Now, that is pretty serious. After the RSV had been around for a number of years, some evangelical scholars said, "We know the King James is still used in this culture, and we know the RSV tries to maintain the majesty of that style. So we want to take the RSV, fix the liberal emendations, and come at it with a Bible-believing approach." That is what the ESV does. It tries to maintain the historic majesty

of the English versions while at the same time using a Bible-believing approach. I love the ESV, I will tell you. Now, part of the reason I do is because I was raised on the King James. If you ask me for a Bible verse, it always comes to my mind in the King James. It will not, probably for your generation, but for mine it does. This is why so many of these study tools are helpful, because many of these were at least initially based on the King James. Thus the ESV is very helpful for maintaining majesty and accuracy. The ESV does majesty and accuracy well.

Here is where the debate comes. People will say, “Those NIV scholars, they were so concerned for dynamic equivalence that they were not even concerned to be accurate! In fact, what they did is just of the devil. Now, some major publishers have published books that actually call the NIV satanic. There are those who say that those who strive for dynamic equivalence rather than a more literal translation are serving the devil. And there are churches even today who are “King James only.” Did you know that? There are even churches that talk about the Saint James Bible. When the Pilgrims came to the United States, who was in power? Who was persecuting Christians of their denomination so that they had to flee? King James. He was no saint. He was trying to establish his own authority over the Church of England. For this reason, he asked scholars to translate a Bible for him that would not be dependent on the Roman Catholic Church. Those scholars happened to be Bible-believing, and they did a great translation that has survived the centuries. But the man for whom they were working was not a very nice man. And there has been much scholarship that has continued to unfold, which is why the King James is now outdated, though it is still wonderful.

There are things that make each of these translations helpful, if they are translated by Bible-believing scholars. Some of the greatest attacks that come against Bible translations come against the paraphrased Bibles like *Living Letters*. Do the paraphrased Bibles help certain people, and can they be helpful to you? Who are the paraphrased Bibles designed to help? People with very low Bible literacy, and sometimes children. Eugene Peterson, on the train back and forth to Chicago, was translating for his children. Then it was printed and sold hundreds of millions of copies, but he had intended it for his children. Do you ever tell a Bible story to your children in simpler language than the Bible says it? Are you evil because you did? You had a reason, right? This is what I want you to understand. Every one of these Bible-believing translations has a purpose. Now, if you make it cross its purpose, then it will not be useful to you. But if you begin to weigh strengths and weaknesses, considering who you are talking to and what the purpose is, then it can help. Do you know when I sometimes use a paraphrased Bible? When I want to get the gist of a lot of material at once, and I really do not want to wade through the meticulous details. I just want to be reminded, what did Job’s friends say to him? And I know that will run across about 25 chapters, so I want to skim that material. Sometimes a paraphrased Bible will help me do that. I will not preach from a paraphrased Bible, but if I want to get a lot of material in front of me, they help. Thus comparing various translations is one way to help our interpretation of a passage.

Another way to help our interpretation after we have looked at various translations is to look at Bible dictionaries. Who was Artaxerxes, after all? When did he rule? What was his language? Who did he interact with? I may need to look up “Artaxerxes” in a Bible dictionary. These are just like normal dictionaries except that they take us through Bible terms, places, and people. Thus if I look up, for example, “mediator,” I will find how the term is developed in the Bible. I can also look up “incarnation” or the location of Samaria and the kinds of people who lived there.

As a side note, a student has asked about the Textus Receptus debate. This is a topic for another class, but let me summarize it briefly. The King James and the New King James are based on what is called the Textus Receptus, or the Byzantine text. There is an argument that this was the main base for translation that existed in the church up until the time of the King James translation. Did God, then,



providentially preserve the Byzantine text or the Textus Receptus, thus making it the main version of the Greek text that the church should depend on? Do you hear the argument? If God providentially preserved it and the church used it for all those centuries, is it not the one we should most depend on? That is the summary of the debate. The Textus Receptus is certainly one of the most dependable of the Greek texts of the New Testament available to us. But it has its problems, too. I think most evangelical, Bible-believing scholars are willing to say the Textus Receptus may be a starting point, but it cannot be the end point. There are other things that need to inform us. We now have thousands more Greek texts of the New Testament that we have discovered since the time of the King James translation, which had only the Textus Receptus available for use. This would seem to indicate that we should use all the information available to us and not just ignore it, saying, "This is what the church did for centuries, so we will not learn any more from these other texts." My main problem with the argument for depending on the Textus Receptus is that it primarily depends on the Western tradition. It is saying that only what the Western church used is dependable and does not consider other major, cultural uses of the Bible. This implies that they do not have anything to say to us. It is a raging debate, although it is a little quieter now than it was 10 or 15 years ago.

Again, a Bible dictionary is a tool you use to look up people, places, or terms from the Bible that you do not know. Another tool you will use are lexical aids. Lexical or grammatical aids. I have here *Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich*, which is basically a dictionary of Greek words, just as we have a dictionary for English words. Of course, there are similar dictionaries for Hebrew, Chaldee, and Aramaic. There are various lexicons for those languages. There are also grammars. There are tools in many of the computer programs we mentioned earlier that will help you do exegetical, lexical study on the computer. You can look up a word in a particular verse and find out the original Greek (or Hebrew) word, the tense, the gender, where it is used elsewhere, etc. There are wonderful aids out there, and often Bible software can help you do a lot of searching as well as provide grammatical aids.

The next, big category is commentaries. Commentaries do not depend on you doing the research. Someone else has done all the work, going through all these exegetical tools and historical patterns. They have now put together their own commentary on that text. There are many commentaries, but people will comment from their theological perspectives. Thus one of the things it is important to have is a guide to biblical commentaries. I have one that our faculty has put together (accessible from Covenant Seminary's library website) for English commentaries, but there are others available that you can buy. In the footnotes of the new edition of my book *Christ Centered Preaching* is information about the various publishers who publish other guides to English commentaries. These guides tell you the theological bent of the commentator, whether he is dispensational, liberal, evangelical, Reformed, Bible-believing, or not. By getting a guide to theological commentaries, you will get a feel for the various commentaries. You can get commentaries based on the Greek or Hebrew text or on an English (or other language) translation of the text. There are many kinds of commentaries. You can get whole-Bible commentaries, which try to give you a brief comment on nearly everything in the Bible. I have one by Eerdmans. It is a whole-Bible commentary, and this particular one from Eerdmans is done by evangelicals. Eerdmans is a little awkward as a publisher because sometimes they publish books by evangelicals and sometimes they do not. More often in recent years, they do not. There are some solely evangelical publishers, such as Baker or Crossway. If you get a whole-Bible commentary from one of them, you can be fairly certain that it is dependable information.

There are also single-book commentaries, those that look only at one book. I have one here on the Gospel of Luke. This commentary is from the series, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. If you were looking at a commentary guide, you would find out that this is an evangelical, Bible-believing commentary set. This is a whole set, covering the whole New Testament and now most

of the Old Testament as well in its companion set, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. If you are in the midst of seminary training, I would not encourage you at this point to go out and buy lots of commentaries. If you have a theological library available to you, I suggest that you become accustomed to using many different commentaries from the library as you exegete texts and prepare sermons for your classes. You will find that some commentaries are very much based on the original texts. They give you essentially commentary on the Greek or Hebrew text. Some commentaries are very scholarly and dense. They deal with the historic debates of that particular text. There are also homiletical commentaries. These do not so much deal with historic debates but rather focus on how you would preach the text.

Over time, as you use different commentaries to help you prepare sermons, you will discover which are most helpful to you. Of course, all these different categories blend to some degree. Even an English or other translation-based commentary will sometimes refer to the Greek or Hebrew, even a homiletical commentary may be scholarly at times, and even an academic commentary may give you hints for preaching. This is a spectrum, not firm categories. Recognizing that, you will find that certain commentators are ones you can use all the time. As you become familiar with the different commentaries, you will know better where to invest your money. Find out what the commentaries are like, use the commentary guides to get familiar with the different kinds. Become familiar with the tools that are available to you, and over time you will get a pretty fair understanding of their respective strengths and weaknesses. Amazon.com is a good place to get commentaries, and Christian Book Distributors (CBD) has both a hard copy catalogue and a website.

The last major category is topical books. These are books that deal with a particular topic, and the whole book deals with that topic. I have a book here by one of our former professors, Dr. Sanderson, called *The Fruit of the Spirit*. In it he only deals with Galatians 5. It is an entire book just on one portion of a chapter. Thus you can get very deep into the issues surrounding Galatians chapter 5 on the fruit of the Spirit.

All these different categories are tools we have for studying a text. A student has asked, “Are commentaries from, say, the 1950s still useful for us?” Yes, as are commentaries from the 1750s and earlier. They are very useful. The older commentaries are typically more useful for homiletical insight and spiritual insight into what is going on. They often will be out-of-date in terms of scholarship. But they are typically very much up-to-date on what has happened up to that point. Sometimes a commentary from the 1950s can even be much better at describing the debate going on at that time or earlier than more recent commentaries are. We may be less interested in that now, but often times you will find issues that need to be dealt with that are not so much on the forefront of scholars’ attention at the present time. Older commentaries are useful more for spiritual and homiletical reasons than for academic study. Some of you may use Matthew Henry’s commentary, which is a classic. Almost everyone uses Matthew Henry’s commentary at some point. The reason is because his pastoral insights are so good. Barkley is another whose pastoral insights are good, though for both these authors their scholastic insights are often outdated.

What is the value of having a text that you preach from? Believe me, it is not for having a holy aura. It is because we want to say what God says. That is the reason we have a text—so that we will say what God says. Has it always been true in the history of preaching that preachers have texts they preach from? Absolutely not. There have been eras in church history during which doctrinal development more than textual commentary was the basis of preaching. But that was typically prior to the non-Christian consensus in which we now live. Years ago in some cultures, including our own, you could talk about a

doctrinal subject and people were able to follow you. At this point, people will want to know what your authority is for that. Thus having a text is pretty much where we are now.

So how do you select a text? There are some rules for selecting a text. When I first started preaching, I thought it was my obligation to take people to obscure and difficult texts. Why? Why do we feel that we really have to show them the tough material? Why do we do such things? To show them we know what we are talking about. Is that always what they need? Probably not. This creates certain problems. If you only go to difficult texts, what are you actually convincing people the Bible is like? It is a codebook that you cannot figure out without the decoder. By the way, who begins to serve as the decoder? You, the preacher. Your people begin to think they have to have you to be able to understand the Bible. But the goal of great preaching is to say, “You can read this. You can figure this out. Let me show you how you can.” The goal of great preaching is not to make people dependent on you; it is to make them dependent on the Word of God. Therefore you want to teach them how they can read it.

So we want to have some prohibitions and some warnings here. What are some things we want to not do? There are about four of these. Do not avoid familiar texts. Why would a text be familiar in the life of the church? Because it is important, because through the ages the church has highlighted it. If a text is familiar, it may be because it is important. Or it may be because it is very accessible, that is another reason. But to deny people what is important or accessible is actually damaging to them. If you look at what Christ was willing to speak, you will see that at times He spoke on very simple things—the birds of the air, Jonah—things people were familiar with. You can look at some of the great preachers from the past, such as Spurgeon. Spurgeon was the greatest Reformed preacher we know of in modern history. When people surveyed all his sermons, they found that his most commonly used texts were Zaccheus, the Prodigal Son, and Joshua. Remember, at that time he was often speaking to the affluent. He did not live in an affluent portion of the city, but there were affluent people who came into his church. Thus he was often speaking to affluent people who would come to his church in a working-class part of London. Why would Spurgeon, speaking to affluent people coming to a working-class church, keep reminding them of Zaccheus? Zaccheus made his living by taking advantage of people, and when he found out he was wrong he said he would restore what he had taken four times over. This would certainly be challenging. Talking to affluent people coming to a working-class church, he said, “Remember Zaccheus. He thought he would make his way by his wealth and his wiles, but he could not do it that way. That was not the way to God.” What about the Prodigal Son? Why would he keep preaching on the Prodigal Son over and over again? If you have messed up, there is a way back.

So far we have these two principles: do not search for obscure texts, and do not avoid familiar texts. The third rule is do not purposely avoid any Scripture. Paul said to the Ephesian elders, “I have not hesitated to communicate to you the whole counsel of God. Whatever was needful for you, I was willing to address.” By the way, if you begin to skip portions as you preach—if you are preaching through a book and then start skipping portions—what will everyone in your congregation do? They will go to that portion you skipped. They will want to know why you are skipping that. To begin to avoid passages is problematic, particularly in what we call consecutive preaching (we will get to that in a minute).

Finally, not only do we not purposely avoid any Scripture, but also we do not use spurious texts. What is a spurious text? One example is the passage about the woman caught in adultery. It is spurious because it is not in the original autograph. We have talked about the “autographer.” It is not what was originally in the Bible. It is not what the apostles or prophets wrote. So how did it get into our Bibles? Usually by scribal emendation, someone adding something in later centuries. One of the reasons we take the Textus Receptus and compare it to other translations is because we can look at the thousands of other texts to see if they match. We can take any major, historical document, look at one particular incident, and see if

any of the thousands of other textual documents have the same incident. If they do not, we typically think that was an emendation, something that was added in. There are some classic spurious texts, such as 1 John 5:7-8 (not included in most recent English translations), "There are these that bear witness in heaven: Father, Word, and Holy Spirit. And these three are one." Is not that a great explanation of the Trinity, right there in the Bible? Every Jehovah's Witness knows this text is spurious and is lying in wait for you to quote it. They will prove to you accurately that this was not in the original text. So if you are trying to prove the Trinity from 1 John 5:7-8, you are in big trouble. Now, is the Trinity attested to in other places in the Bible? Sure it is. But that is not the place to go. Mark 9:29 is another classic example of this: "This kind [of demon] can come out only by prayer and fasting." ("And fasting" is not included in most recent English translations). The phrase "and fasting" is not found in most or in the best manuscripts. Can you see how a scribe might be writing this down, come to the phrase, "This kind can come out only by prayer," and then a monk in a monastery adds "and fasting." Then all future scribes look at the addition and wonder if it was original or added, and so it slowly works its way in.

We can throw up all these problems, but how many words do we have questions about in the body of Scripture? One word in a thousand do we have any question about. If we were writing an essay for someone with 1000 words and there is one word you are unclear about, do you think the person will basically know what you are talking about? Our debate with the liberals is not over what the text says. You need to hear me say that. We all know what the text says, with very few exceptions. Our debate is over whether you believe what the text says. Do you hear the difference? We know what the text says. The debate is whether you will believe it and obey it. For example, if someone argues that the word in Isaiah's prophecy of the birth of the Messiah is not "virgin" but "young woman," you can easily point them to the other places in Scripture that clearly speak of the virgin birth, such as in Matthew and Luke. Thus if you will not accept the virgin birth of Christ, you are not just debating a word in Isaiah. Ultimately, you are saying that what Matthew, Luke, and the historical church have said, what the Bible says, is not true.

Here is the goal in avoiding spurious texts: we want to base a sermon on what the Holy Spirit said, not on what a scribe added. We talked previously about the autographer and the original text. That is why we use various textual schools to help us understand. Someone has asked a very good question. We are not supposed to skip over passages, so what happens if you are preaching through 1 John, and you skip over 5:7? Do you have to deal with it? The answer is yes, you have to deal with it. But one of the reasons you have to deal with it is because virtually every Bible your people use will have an asterisk by it and tell them it is not in the original text. Thus if you do not mention it, they will think you do not even know what their Bibles say. Most dependable Bibles will tell you where we know these problems are. Therefore I think you have to say something like, "We know this was added in later centuries, and while we recognize it reflects truth, it is not part of the original text. It is not inspired by the Holy Spirit." Again, Bibles will often include a note with these kinds of texts, so if you do not tell your people, they will wonder if you do not know what their Bibles say.

Someone has asked that if the note is there, why do they still include the verse? It is because of the dominance of the King James in our culture. That version continues to influence what people expect to see on the page. Somehow they have to deal with the dominant influence of the King James Version in this culture. Another question is is the King James used when translating the Bible into other languages? Inevitably. It is too dominant in our culture for them not to be aware of what the King James says. Most translators do go back to the original languages, but they still have an awareness of what the King James says. Any of the good, modern translations are based on the original languages, but the scholars who do it cannot throw it out of their minds.

There are some things to be careful about as you prepare a sermon. Be careful to base sermons on God's Word. That is what we are trying to do. We are basically affirming the sufficiency of the Word. Thus we base our sermons on God's Word. So what a scribe added, we do not feel we have to add in. What the Holy Spirit gave was sufficient. We base our sermons on God's Word. The second is be careful not to undermine people's confidence. Do you know what happens when I talk about spurious texts? Your questions start flying—what about this? What about that? What happens if I preach from the NIV Bible and say (I have heard of young men doing this), "The NIV translators made a mistake here. This would be better translated..." What does everyone in the congregation begin to wonder? Well, where are the other mistakes? What else is wrong here? I would encourage you to be aware of how arrogance can be projected. "Well, all these scholars said...but I know better." But I also warn you to be aware of how people interpret information. It is far better for people if you say something like, "This is what it says here, but we gain an even richer understanding by knowing this additional background..." Do you see how that is more helpful to people? Then you can add additions rather than creating suspicion of people's Bibles just because you know some more things than they do.

There are also some things to beware of. Beware of motto texts. This is where texts are basically taken out of their context to create a motto. For example, "I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some." "I have become all things to all men..." and there are drug pushers out there, so I should become a drug pusher. The guys in my fraternity love to party with drugs and alcohol, so I should become someone who does the same so that I can relate to them. Is that what that verse means? No, it is taking the verse out of context. Every heretic has his verse because he takes it out of context. He says something that is there, but he takes it out of context. One of the classic motto verses from the hymn of the prohibition movement (in the United States in the 1920s) was "Touch not, taste not, handle not." Let me read you more of the hymn from where I cite it in my book,

Strong drink is raging  
God has said touch not, taste not, handle not  
And thousands it has captive led  
Touch not, taste not, handle not  
It leads the young and strong and brave  
It leads them to a drunkard's grave  
It leads them where no arm can save  
So touch not, taste not, handle not

That is a verse from Colossians that is being used to say, "You should not partake of alcohol." What is the problem with using the words "Touch not, taste not, handle not" in that way? What is the context in Colossians? It is the exact opposite. In that passage Paul condemns those who say, "Touch not, taste not, handle not." He uses exactly the opposite meaning of what this hymn does. Granted, people may have very legitimate concerns about alcoholic addictions. You may have very legitimate concerns, but you want to base your objection on what the Spirit says, not on a wrangling of texts that is not valid.

Let us move on to conditions of selecting a text. What are some conditions for selecting a text? There are two basic philosophies. These two basic philosophies are known as flow and web. The first, flow, is flowing through a text and addressing situations as they come. I may preach from a book of the Bible and, starting in chapter one, I flow through the text. I think of the situations that can be addressed by the text I am in. The second, web, is where you have a situation and you look for a text to deal with it. Now, again, there are historic debates in preaching over the appropriateness and non-appropriateness of these things. I would just encourage you not to get caught up in hyperbole on either side. If Hurricane Ivan is very damaging, will there be preachers in New Orleans or Mobile or the panhandle of Florida who will

need to find texts to help their people deal with that? Of course. And if they have been “flowing” through Isaiah for the past few months, might it be a good idea to move to another text for right now? It might be a good idea. Sometimes the situation demands that we find a text. Sometimes, of course, it is best to move consecutively through a book of the Bible because when you do you can address many different issues that you would not have naturally thought of if you were just on your own. You might take people through the thought of an apostolic writer in order to do that.

Here are possibilities of how we select a text, if you are aware of both web and flow. The first possibility for how we select a text is known as consecutive preaching. Consecutive preaching moves chapter by chapter, book by book. What are some of the advantages of consecutive preaching? I do not have to research a new book every week. Going consecutively through a book really helps the preacher’s research process. That helps me a lot. It also helps avoid deciding what to preach on every week. Last week you preached on chapter one, this week you will preach on chapter two. What does it teach God’s people when you preach consecutively through a text? It teaches the cohesion of the text, how the logic of the writer develops. By the way, while I have mentioned going chapter by chapter, consecutive preaching is very much related to what is called versicular preaching. This is not chapter by chapter, but verse by verse. This could mean preaching one verse at a time, or it could be what we normally do—expository unit to expository unit, paragraph to paragraph, or narrative to narrative—moving in thought units like that.

Another possibility beyond consecutive preaching is subject series. This means identifying various subjects and series of preaching on that subject. In your church, has the preacher ever done a series on the family, or marriage relationships, or healing the brokenness caused by gossip? These are all series on a subject. Do you remember the topical Bible, the *Nave’s Topical Bible*? This helps deal with a topic in a series. What are the advantages of this? Why would you deal with a topic and keep going at it in a series? You have more time to deal with a topic. There may be a particular need that you are addressing. It allows you to deal with a particular need and to a greater depth. Those are some advantages. Also, there is a certain sense of being contemporary if you deal with what people are struggling with. Another possibility is the church calendar. There are many debates in Reformed circles about what days you can honor and what days you cannot. Recognize those debates are there.

Again, I think you have to exegete not only the text but also your congregation and your situation. What can you deal with? In most of our churches, not to deal with the nativity at Christmas time and not to deal with the resurrection at Easter will be perceived as quite odd. Now, there are a few churches that say, “That is just being Catholic, honoring holy days.” Even John Calvin did not believe that. Calvin was willing to honor the major days of the church year but not tie them to the sacerdotal system. He was willing to do that. You can read those debates; I do not mean to try to solve them for you. But I do mean to make you aware that most preachers in this culture keep an awareness of where we are in the holidays of the year, and not only the church holidays, but at times the national holidays as well. I say only partially joking that you can fail to mention fathers on Father’s Day, but making no mention of mothers on Mother’s Day may get you in trouble. This is just an awareness of where our culture is that you need to deal with even if you object to it. Be aware of those things.

The dangers of subject series and even calendar series is that we can begin to concentrate on cultural preferences or personal preferences rather than the Bible. Do you hear that? For example, a preacher might say, “I love talking about the problem of gambling in this culture. So now this is my 52nd series on the subject of gambling!” Two things will happen if you do this. First, people will get very bored. But second, who will they think really has a problem with gambling? You, the preacher. Subject series may begin to highlight my own sin struggles in ways I did not intend to if I cannot move off the subject. If all

the time I am talking about a sin struggle in one area, people will begin to think, “This person does not know what I am going through. This must be what they are going through.” Or, we can just begin to ride hobbyhorses, focusing on our interests rather than preparing God’s people for the spectrum of their concerns.

Here are some standards for interpreting a text. Be true to the text. Use historical-grammatical method rather than spiritualizing. Spiritualizing is sometimes called the allegorical method. We are looking for the literal meaning. Now, that scares people. “You mean you are one of those fundamentalists who believe the Bible literally?” Well, the Reformers used the phrase *sensus literalis*. The *sensus literalis* means the literal sense of the words. What was actually being communicated? In modern terminology we could say what does the discourse mean? This is not *litterum*, taking words woodenly. When you say, “It was raining cats and dogs,” do you mean cats and dogs were falling out of the sky? No. What does the discourse mean? It was raining very hard. That is what you mean. Likewise, a prophet may refer to the Word of God going to the four corners of the earth. Does he mean the earth is square? Do you sometimes refer to the four corners of the earth? You mean the compass settings, right? What I mean by looking for the literal meaning is taking the sense of the author—what the author intended to say—is what we believe. Hear that? This is not literal, wooden, silly use of language. This is looking for discourse meaning.

The second standard is determining the author’s intent. To do this we will examine audience, genre, text features, and context (both historical and literary context). Here are some special cautions: in language, be cautious about depending on English language only. If you are in Philippians 2:13, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do his good pleasure.” You may think, “What? Work out your salvation with fear and trembling?” I actually do not know how you can explain that verse if you do not know the Greek behind it. If you know the Greek, you know the first “work” reference is about working something in a continual way, and the second reference, “for it is God who is at work...” is a verb of completed action. Thus you can explain it this way, “You should be working on what God has done.” Otherwise, if you say simply, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling...” I do not know anyone who can do that. I do not know how you could explain it with English only. Also, be careful of depending on out-of-date translations. The King James in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 says, “We who are alive when Christ comes shall not prevent the dead from rising.” Now, can you perceive what that means? What is the meaning of “prevent” in the King James? At the time of writing, “prevent” meant “precede,” “to come before.” Thus, if we are dependent on English only and an older translation, we will not recognize at all what is meant.

Let us move to genre. There are some different things here. Prophecy that is not presented as predictive will get you in big trouble. You will interpret it wrongly. Isaiah 40 is about the suffering servant who gives up assurance. But it is talking about the Messiah to come. If we do not place Isaiah 40 in the future, we will misinterpret the text.

Parables are another difficult genre. With parables we look for the meaning core rather than trying to make every particular mean something. In the account of Lazarus and the rich man, the rich man speaks to the poor man across an abyss. They talk to one another across a physical abyss between heaven and hell. Does that mean there is physical distance between heaven and hell and that the saints in heaven talk to those who are in hell? Is that what that means? It does not mean that at all. What is being expressed is the core meaning of the parable, which we should recognize: there is not a chance of returning to this earth again to establish our justification before God. Now is the time. We push the parable beyond what its intention was when we look to every particular instead of its core meaning.

Another genre is proverbs. Proverbs are prescriptive, not predictive. “A soft answer turns away wrath.” Now, is that God’s promise that when you answer softly, people will never get mad at you? Is that what it means? It says right there in the Bible, “A soft answer turns away wrath”! A proverb is prescriptive. The wise people lay it to heart. It is the counsel for how they should live. It is not an absolute promise of what will occur. You know a soft answer does not always turn away wrath. What about this one? “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Is that always true? Every good parent raises up good children, and bad children are obvious evidence of bad parenting. Is that true? Have you ever heard it preached that way? People took a proverb and made it predictive rather than prescriptive. It is not predictive. It is not an absolute promise or prediction of what will occur. What father in the Scripture is presented as an ideal father and raises a bad son? Luke 15, the father who raises the prodigal son. Another genre is narratives versus didactic passages. In narratives we have to look at the actions for what communicates truth in addition to the words in most cases. The actions more than or rather, in addition to the words, communicate truth in narratives. Actually, in a narrative what someone says may be false. Job’s friends say very bad things and yet it is in the Bible! If you quote Job’s friends as saying true things, you are in big trouble because they are telling him wrong things.

What we are trying to do is this: maintain and understand the text’s features for their functions. Are the chapter and verse divisions inspired? No, they are not. If a word is italicized, is that there for emphasis? No, it is because it was missing in the original language. An italicized word means it is being filled in for the flow of language, and this word did not appear in the original. It is not there for emphasis, it is there for de-emphasis. The book order of our Bibles is not inspired—Matthew being before Luke, for example. What we are trying to do for all these things is to remember the context. In interpretation, context is always part of the text. With Romans 14 and 15, if you do not read chapter 14, you will understand exactly the opposite of what is meant in chapter 15 concerning who is weak and who is strong. You will get it exactly backward if you do not read Romans 15 in the context of Romans 14. The example I really love is Genesis 31:49, “May the Lord watch between you and me whenever we are apart.” People in our culture print that on coins, break them apart, and give them to one another. This is what Laban said to Jacob. And what does it mean? “If you come back across my territory, I will slit your throat. And may the Lord watch between you and me while we are apart.” That is what it means. People use it for these wonderful, sentimental cards and such, but that is not what it means. What is the context?

Let us move on to possible approaches for interpretation. The broad view is this: sometimes we have to take a lot of text at once. For example, you may recognize, “I need to deal with both the early and later parts of Job in order to preach it. So I will distill a lot of material.” That is the broad view. I can distill it down and preach it accurately. That is often what we do with narratives: take a lot of material and distill it down to its essence. The narrow view is exploding the implications. I will take one verse or one paragraph and tell you the implications of it. I want you to know those are both legitimate teaching approaches: to distill a lot of information or to explode a little information. These are both legitimate ways of preaching. At times, both are necessary.

The final thought for this lesson is not to deny your people your interpretation. Do not deny yourself or your people your interpretation. Here is one of the great dangers you can find in seminary or other training where you use all these great commentaries: I want to preach on a text, and I run first to a commentary to figure out how to do it. Now what will happen? Whose thoughts will I think? Someone else’s thoughts. Someone who is away from the situation, maybe even someone who has been dead for years. We do not want to preach a dead or a distant person’s sermon. Believe that God put you in this situation to minister to these people. We want to be those who are thinking God’s thoughts for these people, and be careful not to preach a dead or a distant man’s sermon. The way we do that is we study the text even as we study God’s people and ask, “What is God saying to me for these people?” Start



down the path, believing God has a purpose for you. Now, will we check ourselves? Sure we will. We will use all these tools to make sure we are going down proper paths. But I would encourage you not to make your first step, “What do the commentaries say?” Make your first step: read, digest the text, and say, “What do God’s people need to hear?” And then progress that way.

## **The Road from Text to Sermon**

I am Dr. Zack Eswine, and I will be teaching in Dr. Chapell's place today. He is traveling, so if you would keep him in your prayers, that would be appreciated. It is a privilege for me to be with you. Let us begin our time together in prayer.

*Father, we thank You very much for the way You have been faithful to each one of us. You are so thoroughly knowledgeable of the cares that we have and the dreams and hopes we have, the regrets we have, the confusion, the questions, the joys. We thank You that You have declared You are the knower of the heart. We ask that You would be pleased to continue to be the lifter of our head, as You say in Your Word, that we might know that You are God, that there is no other, and that our hope rests with You. We ask that You would bless Dr. Chapell and his work as he travels today, that You would bless their efforts in the Gospel. We ask, Lord, that You would bless our time now for Your name's sake. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Let us begin today with a little bit of review. Why do we need to be cautious about spurious texts? Because we want to preach what the Holy Spirit has preached for us, has written for us, so we want to be cautious about texts where there are questions and do our homework on those.

Second, how does an allegorical method of interpretation differ from an expository one? An allegorical method goes beyond what appears to be the clear meaning of the text. So, in an expository approach, we are trying to get at the intent of the author, what the author meant by the connection of words. In an allegorical approach, we look from the imagination of the reader, us—we are making connections from our own imagination. An example that you may have discussed is Rahab's red cord. The spies go in, there is Rahab, she sets out a red cord. Red is the color of blood. Blood is what our Lord shed for us. Therefore, when Rahab set her cord out, she was foreshadowing the blood of Christ. Well, that really preaches well. A similar one would be of Noah and his ark. The ark is made of wood. The Lord Jesus died on a cross, which was made of wood. Therefore Noah in his ark was saved by the wood of the ark, just like the people of God are saved by the wood of the cross. David chose five smooth stones. The first stone was the stone of faith. The second stone was the stone of courage. The third stone...well, I think you see where we are going. It is not that the Lord does not use these things, He certainly does. It is certainly true that God has blessed many of our faithful brothers who have preached sermons like that. But God has blessed them more because of His compassion and kindness to us in our weakness than because of the wisdom of those interpretations. As best as we are able, we are seeking to understand from Scripture what connections Scripture actually makes. So, with Rahab's cord, for example, we have no textual indication that in that historical text red is supposed to point us somewhere else. As best as we are able, we refrain from making connections that the Bible does not make. All of us are mixed works in this endeavor, and God is kind to us nonetheless, but we try our best.

The third question is what are web and flow and how do they affect text selection? A web is where the situation that you are facing determines the kind of text you choose. Flow is when the text itself, the passage itself, determines what we will preach about.

Finally, why should a preacher be careful not to run to a commentary as a first step in his sermon preparation? We should be careful, because we are in a situation that the person who wrote the commentary is not in. We may even be in a time and place, a generation that the person who wrote the commentary is not in. We trust that the Lord has called us and given us tools to understand His Word by

means of His Spirit. So, we want to give ourselves to Him first and then look to see what other brothers and sisters have said as a guard and check for us.

Moving from review to our present talk, the goal for this lesson is to see how we progress from words on a page in a passage of Scripture to a sermon that is designed to change hearts. We will combine arguments for a sermon and tools and rules for interpreting a text. We will give some basic introductions to what you do as you look at a passage of Scripture as you are thinking of using it to prepare a sermon.

Now, why might this matter? Imagine I am sitting in my office as a social worker in Indiana and a woman is sitting across from me. Her face is swelled up and black and purple from where her husband in all his various weaknesses, brokenness, and sin, has been hitting her. She asks the question, “What does the Bible say to me about this?” By that question she is not just asking, “Do I leave or not?” She is asking the question, “How does a person of faith handle this kind of trauma? What it does to my dreaming, what it does to my memories, what it does to all that I had hoped for and longed for, what it does to the betrayal I feel, the love I had thought once was, how does a person of faith walk with God in the midst of this kind of trauma?”

Sometimes, you see, what we need from Scripture is not just the answers to pass a test. What we need is help to know how to live. Imagine that you are a person in a workplace, a corporate setting, and a decision is made higher up that is unethical. This causes you to question. So you come to your pastor, your Bible study leader, or your elder and say, “How do I navigate this situation?” At that point we could say, “Do you believe the creed? Do you believe the Westminster Confession of Faith?” He might say, “Well sure, yes.” And we say, “Then, all is well.” He would say, “Well, no, how does the Westminster Confession of Faith help me know what to do in this situation? How do the truths of the faith help me to know what to do in this situation?” When we come to a sermon passage, we are reminded of the fact that you may have two people married for 15 or 20 years who come into your pastor’s study having marital difficulty. You might ask them the question, “Do you believe in the fundamentals of the faith?” They would say, “Yes.” “Do you believe in the Apostle’s Creed?” “Yes.” “Do you follow the catechisms?” “Yes.” “Then, what is the problem?” “Well she started...and he started...” See, it is not a matter of accenting the right truths. It is a matter of the wisdom to apply those truths to the situations that we all face in a fallen world. Therefore a sermon, what we bring forth from the Word of God, is not just trying to equip people to answer the right questions. We are trying to equip people for living. We are trying to bring truth to their life circumstances so that they have wisdom, so they will know how to think, what to do, and how to respond.

To do that we can use, as Dr. Chapell mentioned, six critical questions for sermon preparation. These are six basic questions you can ask. That is what we want to walk through in this lesson, these six questions.

The first question is what does this text mean? These questions seem obvious and intuitive as we walk down through them. But in the midst of time demands, in the midst of the rush of our own heart, we may forget to walk through these steps and ask these basic intuitive questions. Also, we are taking these questions in a particular order but gradually as you become familiar with them they sort of ebb and flow. But first, what does this text mean? To answer this question, you employ these steps. First, step A, read, reread, and digest the text. You remember Psalm 1, where we are told about the person who is like a tree, “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.” Who is that person? It is the person who meditates on the Law of God day and night (that means always). Meditating means thinking about it over again and again, holding it up and looking at the same thing we have looked at before but looking at it from a different angle. Charles Spurgeon called it “Lying asoak in the text,” bathing in the text. We read it, but we know just because we have

read it once does not mean we know what is really there. By the fifth or sixth time you read the passage, you will see things you never saw before. We keep saturating ourselves with the text because our intention is to get a sense of what the text has to say to us in the hands of the Lord.

Second, step B, observe context. That means we look at the literary phrasing, words, and genre that is going on there. Imagine you are in the Psalms, for example, and a psalm says, “The Lord has delivered me from the pit.” Compare that to Joseph in Genesis; in the account there we know that Joseph was thrown into a pit. Does the psalmist mean the same thing that Moses meant in Genesis about the pit? No. The Psalms are poetry. When David uses the word “pit,” he is using it to describe a condition of the soul in light of a circumstance. Whereas in the historical narrative, the account of Joseph, it was an actual pit that he was thrown into. So, context involves looking at phrasing, the literary features of the text. But it also involves looking at the history, the surrounding context of what was taking place.

When my wife Shelley and I were first engaged, we were in a living room in a house where many of my family were gathered for an occasion. We came in beaming, and we announced our engagement. Then we said, “Everyone is invited to the wedding!” Now imagine that a reporter from a newspaper was there and he took a picture, wrote up an article, and the next day the headline said, “Eswine invites everyone to the wedding!” It is a right quote, is it not? He quoted me correctly. But if you read the paper, you will assume you have been invited to the wedding because of context. I said the word “everyone,” and I meant those who were in that living room. So, we have to get into “the living room” of the passage to see what someone meant when they wrote it.

Let us look at James 1:5 as an example. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” Now, on most occasions when we think about this passage, we are thinking about decisions we have to make, something unknown that we want God to show us. We need to know which school to send our children to or which job we are supposed to take. So we turn to this passage and find comfort: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God.” That is a wonderful help that this passage brings to us. However, if we take a look at context just a bit, we see that James has a meaning much more profound than decision making. Remind yourself of verses 2-4: the situation is “trials of various kinds.” As you go down through verse 4, you see “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” “Not lacking anything.” Now, you will see that phrase repeated at the beginning of verse 5, a parallel phrase, “If any of you lacks wisdom.” Thus, what he says is “If you are in a trial of any kind, the Lord wants to complete you so that you lack nothing. If you lack wisdom, ask.” Now, suddenly here it sounds a little strange. We lack wisdom. We lack the ability to know which school to choose in the midst of trials, so we take this as a comfort. The context seems to be about trials in people’s lives. Well, we keep reading, and by the time we get over to 3:13, we realize that James uses this word again. It is always a helpful thing when thinking through context to ask, “Does the author talk about this idea any other place in his writing?” James 3:13-15 says, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.” What is wisdom that is unspiritual? It is, notice, “bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts.” It seems like James is equating wisdom with character. Well, let us keep reading. Verse 16 says, “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice...” Now, notice the contrast in verse 17: “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”

Notice how James uses the word wisdom. There are two kinds in his mind, heavenly and earthly or unspiritual. Notice that wisdom for James has to do with character, as in the contrast of bitter jealousy with gentleness or peace. Now go back to chapter 1 and have James' definition of wisdom in your mind. You are in the midst of a trial, beloved, "If any of you lacks wisdom," that means, "If any of you lacks gentleness, peace, if any of you lacks being full of mercy and good fruit, let him ask." "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." Now suddenly—see?—that makes much more sense and becomes much more profound for the believer. If you are in the midst of a trial and you are responding to that trial with bitter jealousy or envy or anger and you need wisdom from heaven, you need the grace from heaven to respond to that trial in a way that imitates the character of God, ask and He will give it. Suddenly now you see what this verse means.

The way I often think of it is, it is three o'clock in the morning, and the baby has been crying for two hours now. You are sliding down the hallway, weeping on the floor because you just yelled at that baby with all your might and you cannot believe what you just did. Suddenly James 1:5 becomes a promise for that mother or that father in the night. If you lack gentleness, peace, mercy in the midst of your trial of any kind, ask for it. He will give it. So, context helps us, it opens up for us the meaning of a passage.

Step C is open up the unknowns, such as the grammar, words, meaning, and the historical data. You are in the book of Jonah 1:2 or 3, and you notice that the text uses the word "Tarsus" three times in one verse. You think to yourself, "It must be important to know what Tarsus is because it says 'Tarsus...Tarsus...Tarsus' in one verse." So you look it up. You find out what Tarsus is. We look up things that are unknown.

Step D is identify parallels, words or concepts that are in other passages. We begin by looking at one passage. Then we do just like we did in James chapter 1. We see him talk about wisdom, and we find if it is talked about somewhere else as well. We go and find those passages that help us.

Step E is we grasp the main idea and identify features of its development. We are trying to grasp the main idea and the features of identifying the main idea. So when we ask the question, "What does this text mean?" We are trying to conclude what the text is basically about. What is it saying?

Question two is how do I know what it means? This is really important. Our practice in a small group type of setting is to read the verse, say, "What does this verse mean to you?" and then everyone in the group shares. This can be a very helpful way to discuss the Scripture together. But it is often helpful to first ask the question, "What did this mean for the writer of the text? How do I mean that is what this meant?" This forces me to look back at the Bible and prove to myself I am getting my ideas from the Bible.

There are some different ways to do this. The first is to create a thought-flow outline. This is where you simply identify the subject, verb, and object. You may have learned this at some point in your schooling. You put the subject, verb, and object into a sentence schemata so you can look at it and see what the primary words used are. Another tool is to use a mechanical layout. This is an outline of sentence or paragraph structure. You show the independent and dependent clauses and how they connect to one another. An independent clause is the main idea in relationship to a dependent clause, which is the supporting idea or the modifier. The independent clause in Matthew 6:1 is "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men..." The dependent clause is "...to be noticed by them." The dependent clause is that which modifies or further expresses what is being said. Another tool you can use is a conceptual outline, where you walk down through the text and outline the concept. You highlight the main ideas

you see. For example, you might outline 2 Samuel 11-12 this way, “David disobeyed God. He committed adultery and murder. God convicted David. He sent His Word to identify the sin. David repented toward God. He confessed his sin, expressed sorrow, and sought new obedience.” It is just the overarching theme you see as you walk down through the passage.

Whatever tool we learn to use (remember we are only introducing these tools today), what you are to try to do is to show from the passage where you are getting your ideas. Why is this important? Because eventually, when you preach your sermon, you will have a concept that we will call “state, place, and prove.” What that means is that you will be expected to state your main idea, state what the main idea is from the passage (for example, “You must love one another”). But then we will also ask you to place that idea in the text. Then you will need to prove from that text the concept you are expressing to us. As you listen to others preach, you will notice this kind of phrase that someone may use all the way through the sermon: “Look with me in verse...” Some preachers will come back to that all the way through the sermon: “Look with me in verse...” Or they may say, “...as we see in verse...” all the way through the sermon. When we do this, it is in essence because we want the hearer’s head to constantly go down into the text and back up and back down. This is because we want them to see in the text where we get our ideas from. Why is this important? Because the text is their authority, not us. We want the Scripture to be what leads them and for the Scripture to be what guides what we say. Therefore we want to ask this second question. It is not just, “What is the main idea?” but also, “How do I know from the text?” This causes us to look back at the text.

Dr. Chapell says, “The larger the expository unit, the more appropriate the latter alternatives for outlining.” What he is saying there is that when you have a larger portion of Scripture to deal with, it can be very time-consuming and tedious to do a sentence-by-sentence grammatical outline on, for example, two chapters. (This, of course, will depend on your situation). In the context of pastoral ministry, you will normally have at least three, maybe four other sermons and Bible studies to prepare for as well. Thus we do not always have the opportunity to use the more meticulous outline. But what you can do is use the conceptual outline for those larger portions of Scripture and then use a grammatical outline for those key places in that larger portion that stand out to you. In creating such outlines for the study of a passage, which are known as exegetical outlines, it is advisable to identify which verses correspond to which outline components. You could do this by putting the verse number in parentheses next to the sentence or next to the concept you are getting. Why should you do this? This is part of the second question we are asking, how do I know? When I write something down about what the text is saying, I want to put the verse or portion of the verse next to it so that when I come back to it I can see where in the text I got my point or idea. It keeps leading me back to the text.

Use the development of the thought-flow outline, then, to lead you into and through an in-depth study of two things: (1) language, the study of language and (2) genre. Language becomes important for communicating rightly the Word of God. Genre is what I referred to earlier. Our earlier example of this was how the psalmist uses the word “pit” in contrast to its use in Genesis. What helps me to know the difference between the uses of this word is to know the genre of the Psalms, which is poetry, and to know the genre of Genesis, which is historical narrative. Knowing the genre of the passage helps me to rightly understand, or at least have more clues as to what the Word might mean. We know the Lord has communicated to us with history, with psalms, with narratives, with proverbs. Thus we want to ask the question, “What is the genre?”

Another question to ask within this category is what is the context? You will notice we continue to repeat this idea. Why is that? Context, context, context. Context matters to keep us in the “living room” of the passage so that we will know the meaning. Context involves four things: observation, comparison,

word study, and context study. Thus looking at context means observing what is there, comparing with other Scriptures, doing word studies, and looking at the historical background (such as the connections of that text with any other text in Scripture.” When we get to Christ-centered preaching, we will add another idea to our context. That idea is redemptive context—what does this passage mean in the light of redemptive history? Redemptive history is the Lord unfolding what He would do in Christ Jesus. Was this before the cross, or does this text come after the cross? What implications does the location of the text within the scope of God’s plan have for us?

The third main question we ask is what concerns caused this text to be written? Why was this text given to us? First, that means we study the author’s intentions. Why did Paul write this to them? Why did the author write this to them. Well, Paul, for example, talks about love to the Corinthians in a way he does not with the Philippians or the Galatians. It is only to the Galatians that Paul says, “If anyone preaches another gospel to you, let him be accursed.” It is on to the Galatians that he speaks so strongly. Why the differences? That is what we are getting at. Why did the author say this to them? By asking these questions, we can better understand the author’s intentions. Second, we study the passage’s context. The question, “What concerns caused this text to be written?” brings us back to context again. What was going on? What was the situation in Galatia, for the Galatian churches? What was the situation that caused Paul to speak so strongly to them? What was the situation in Philippi that would cause Paul to speak about “joy” so much to them? Third, we study God’s mind, the mind of the Lord. What concerns caused this text to be written?

This brings us back to our theology for a moment. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, we are reminded that the natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit. We are reminded that when we come to the Scriptures, we cannot naturally understand what is there. God is the author of the Scriptures. The Spirit of the Lord is the One through whom this Word was written. Therefore, when Paul wrote to the Galatians, he wrote as an inspired apostle. It was the Spirit of the Lord speaking to the Galatians with Paul as ambassador of Christ. So we want to know ultimately why the Lord is saying this to His people. That leads us to a remembrance of our dependence on the Spirit of God. It reminds us of the psalmist’s prayer, “Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from your law.” It reminds us of Proverbs chapter 2 when we are told to cry out for wisdom, to raise our voice for understanding from His Word. Therefore the study of context is not just grammar and historical study. It also includes prayer, because we are trying to understand what the author meant, and thus ultimately, why the Lord wrote this to us.

To answer the question of authorial intention also requires remembering. What does this mean? First, causal concerns may be implied or stated. Sometimes the author of the text tells us explicitly why he writes. For example, near the end of John, around chapter 20 or so, John tells us why he writes the book. He says, “These signs have been written so that you may believe.” Thus anytime you preach from John, you are reminded of what his purpose was. Any of the signs, any of the miracles recorded there, have been written to strengthen and arouse faith in people. The apostle Paul says in Philippians 4:2 (this is a stated purpose), “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.” This is an explicit purpose he states. But in Philippians there is also an implied purpose. It is less explicit, but it is still there. Philippians 2:4 says, “Look not on your own things, but on the things of others.” That makes sense, right? He has been speaking about having the mind of Christ and about considering the needs of others. By the time he comes to chapter 4, he makes an explicit application. These two sisters need to apply this to their lives. Thus sometimes the intention of the author can either be implied or explicitly stated. Background and logic may also be needed to determine implied concerns. Historical context can also help us understand what the author was trying to get at and why. We remember in Galatians when Paul the apostle talks about what justifies us before the Lord. Why does he talk so much here about what justifies us before the Lord? Well, because we know from history

and from the text itself that a group called the Judaizers were coming in and persuading this new church with a new teaching that went contrary to Scripture. By knowing that context and what he is saying, even though the apostle may not explicitly state, “This is why I am writing this letter,” we gain a sense of why this text had to be written.

At this point you have been asked three questions: what is the text saying? How do you know? and What are the intentions of the author? At this point, when you have answered all those questions, you merely have a lecture. You are ready to give a lecture. You can say true things about the passage. You can tell us historical context, you can tell us the meanings of words. You can tell us what the situation was and why the text was written. You could give a lecture at this point. Now, often in the midst of ministry demands, we stop there and think we are ready for the sermon. But, we want to remind ourselves of where we started. People are living before the Lord in the world. This means they are facing all manner of situations. This means they need more than just the answers to the test. They need the Word of God to come to bear on their situation. We might remind ourselves of a subtle nuance between teaching and preaching. That is, when the apostle Paul speaks to Timothy in 2 Timothy about “Preach[ing] the Word...” he goes on to say, “with correcting, rebuking, exhorting with all longsuffering and patience.” The preaching of the Word seems to have this further movement of getting into the inner being, bringing the Word to bear in such a way that it corrects, rebukes, and exhorts. It moves beyond the giving of information and into applying that information to the souls of the hearers, according to what they need before the Lord, according to the Word.

We want to start moving, then, toward the sermon. We do not want to stop at question three but continue on to question number four: what do we share in common with...? Another way to think of this would be “mutual human condition.” What is the mutual human condition? What do we share in common with, first of all, those to whom the text was written? And also, what do we share in common with those by whom the text was written? How we answer this question identifies the fallen condition focus (FCF). So the answer to this question identifies the FCF. Remember that the fallen condition has to do with either our finiteness—that we are not the Lord and cannot know all things, we experience difficulty simply because of that and we need His provision—or it can also do with sin, the fact that we are broken, even willfully so and we need His provision. To answer the question, “What is the Fallen Condition Focus?” we ask, “What do we have in common with the author of the text or with the recipient of the text?”

Imagine you are teaching from 2 Peter. We know from reading the letter that the people to whom Peter writes are scattered and dispersed. We also know they are under fire for their faith. So, they are scattered, harassed, and under fire for their faith. If you were in that situation and the only one who could help you was miles away and could not do anything to physically relieve your situation, what would you need to hear? What would you need to know? How would you make it through? We would ask the question then, “What is the mutual human condition? Where is it today that the people of God are scattered, harassed, and facing heat for their faith with no one able to physically lift a hand to help them?” When we ask that question, we are starting to get a mutual human condition, what we have in common with those in the situation of the text.

We might also consider it from the other way. Imagine that those you love are miles away; you cannot do anything to help them while they are physically being pained. They are struggling, harassed, and you cannot stop it. How do you deal with that? That is Peter’s situation. So what does he do? He writes a letter. Even more than that, what would you say to them? What would you say to the ones you loved whom you could not physically help? What would you say to them in the midst of their trials? Read 2 Peter and find out what Peter said to them. Do you see? We are getting at a mutual human condition, why the text was written to apply to us and to help us. If I know why the text was written for Thomas, I



find how I am like Thomas and how that text applies to me. I find how I am like David. It is not just that David had an affair and murdered someone—our response should not be, “Oh, how terrible is that.” Our response should be, “Oh wow, what do I have in common with David? What was in his heart is in my heart.” What does that mean? It means I need to hear what David needed to hear. Now, there are certainly times when we ask the question, “How are we *not* like those who are being written about in the text?”

Imagine Esther. Mordecai says to her, “Who knows, Esther, but that you were appointed for such a time as this?” Thus our great temptation as preachers or teachers is to say right away, “How are you like Esther?” And then we want to say to everyone, “Who knows but that *you* were appointed for such a time?” Well, that could be very appropriate, but if we step back and remind ourselves, “How are we not like Esther?” we remind ourselves that 99% of the covenant people of Israel then thought they were going to die. Ninety-nine percent of the people had no knowledge of what was going on inside the palace and what the Lord was doing with this formerly unknown girl named Esther. That means they had to live their lives wondering how God would provide for them in the midst of their trial. Then they found out that God provides for His covenant people in the most unlikely of ways. He raised up a deliverer from an unlikely place. He appointed a girl, Esther, and brought her to the palace for such a time as that, to deliver His people. That opens up a whole other way of application and thinking.

Thus sometimes it is helpful to ask the question, “How are we *not* like Joseph and his dreams? How are we *not* like Esther?” And then we can come back and ask the question, “How are we like them? What do we have in common?” First Corinthians 10:13 forms the basis of why we think this is appropriate to do: “No temptation has taken you but such as is common to man.” God’s Word comes and ministers to His people in their temptations. And He has told us there is nothing uncommon. We too, then, know we face those kinds of temptations as well. We need the Word of God to speak to us just as it did to them. What do we share in common with...? Good preaching, then, does not merely describe the information in a text or the truths about a doctrine. Good preaching identifies how an FCF of the passage touches and characterizes our lives. We are not merely doing what a commentary has already done for us. We are going beyond that to say, “If they needed to hear this from the Lord, and we find ourselves in the same kinds of situations they did, then it stands to reason we need to hear what they heard from the Lord. If it helped them in their situation, it will help us in our common situation.”

Question number five is how should we respond to the truths of Scripture? What difference does this make for me? To answer this you must look first to why we need the truths of the text. Why do we need this? Second, how does this apply to us? When the apostle speaks to us about love, we not only parse each word to describe the Greek word for “rudeness,” “patience,” and all that. We not only describe the historical context of what was taking place in Corinth. We move on from that description to identify what we have in common with the Corinthians and why we need to hear today what Paul said to them yesterday. And then we ask, how does what the apostle said apply to us in our circumstances? This answering of the “why” and “how” questions is the turnkey that makes the following sermons sermons. The truth principle of 2 Samuel 12:7 is Nathan’s account of the rich man stealing the lamb. But then it gets to the point where he says what it means to David, what this account means for David: “You are the man, David.” Or consider Matthew 6:28-30: “Behold the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they spin. Yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field which today is and tomorrow is cast into the fire, will he not much more clothe you...?” Do you see how the question at the end comes right to His listeners? And then Jesus says, “will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” Or consider Joshua 24:15 when he recounts Israel’s redemptive history. He ends by saying to those who are listening, “Choose this day whom you will serve...” In light of what is true, what God has done—how does this affect you? Choose this day whom you will serve.

Thus a good sermon answers these questions: first, so what? What difference does it make? To illustrate this, Dr. Chapell tells his story of Dr. Rayburn who taught this class when Dr. Chapell was a student. Dr. Rayburn would always say, “When you finish a sermon, I want you to imagine me standing at the back of the church with my arms folded and saying to you, ‘So what? So what? Who cares what the Greek word for rude is? So what? What difference does it make for us, the covenant people of God seeking to walk before the Lord?’” A good sermon answers that question, “So what?” A good sermon also answers the question, “What am I to do or to believe?” What am I to do in light of this passage? Or what am I to believe in light of this passage? How does it shape or transform my actions in the coming week or my beliefs about situations in the coming week? The third question a good sermon answers is what change does God require in my life and/or in my heart?

After we have taken the truth to life, rather than creating a list of to-do’s and beliefs, we are taking the truth to where people live, applying the Scripture in light of the mutual human condition and context to our situation. The next thing we do is ask, “What is the most effective way I can communicate the content and application of the text? What is the best way I can communicate this to this people, at this time, in this place? We know that no matter how long we are given for a message, whether it is 15 minutes or 30 or 50, there is always more to be said. Therefore, we ask the question, what is the best way to communicate what I have to say today in the time allotted for these people?

The best way to communicate what I have to say today in the time allotted for these people is to use organizational tools. First, we use collection. This is grouping multiple ideas into single thought packets. The next thing we do is subordination. We prioritize and arrange major and supporting ideas. Third, we use simplification. We make complex ideas simple, not vice versa.

I would like to ask you to think about what has been modeled for you by Dr. Chapell. You have not had the opportunity to have Dr. Chapell in a doctorate-level class. In a doctorate-level class, you especially realize the expertise and knowledge that he has when it comes to communication and preaching. And yet he speaks to us about swiss cheese, deadly bees, and the “who door.” He has these simple ways of saying things. It requires much humility on our part to speak with the woman by the well and just talk about water. Even though we know all kinds of theological things, we want to make it simple for people so that they can understand it, knowing that they have not had a seminary education. We want to make it simple for them. This is the seminarian error: first, to try to make things complex, believing that complexity equals greatness or maturity. Another error is to believe that seriousness is constituted of complexity and volume. I have fallen into that error myself, both trying to be too complex and trying to be too serious and equating that with having a loud voice and much to say. This is the seminarian error. We need more than explanation of a passage. The seminarian error is to forget to apply the Word. We learn so many facts, so many good things, that some times we just want to share all those facts and things with people. That is wonderful, and yet we need to go on to application.

There is also an overreaction, the overreaction error in America. K-I-S-S stands for “keep it simple, stupid.” This is an acronym used by some mainstream American preachers. Listen, neither you nor your people are stupid. We are not to patronize people. When we say, “keep it simple,” we do not mean to treat people as if they had no intelligence. We simply mean to try to understand where people are at, what they are capable of grasping from this passage, and to make it clear to them what the passage is saying. Here is a more balanced view: the best preaching says profound things simply. This takes work. It is easy to say profound things in a complex way, but it takes work to say profound things in a simple way. That work often involves meditation on our part, continuing to wrestle with how to make this clear.

A help to you may be to remember what the apostle Paul prayed, or asked for, in Colossians. In Colossians 4:3-4, he says, “At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.” The apostle is asking the Lord and asking his friends to pray for him to the Lord, that when he declares mysteries, the mystery of the Gospel, he can make it plain and clear. So we work hard, which includes meditating and also includes asking the Lord for help, to make profound things simple. After all, He is very good at that. We remind ourselves, as John Calvin would tell us, that the Bible is God’s lisping to us. It is His baby talk. You can think of it in this way—though it is a humbling realization—when you have mastered divinity, you have merely mastered the baby talk of God. He is infinite in wisdom, infinite in majesty, infinite in knowledge. And he has lisped to us so that we can understand something from His infiniteness. Therefore we ask Him who does it so well, “Lord, help us to make Your mysteries plain in Christ to people.” Let us revisit the K-I-S-S acronym. How can we use this properly? Instead of “keep it simple, stupid, we say, “keeping it simple is smart.” There is no need to imply that we are stupid or that our people are stupid. Rather, we keep it simple because that is smart.

Remember, there are only four things that can be done to explain any text or idea. The first is you can repeat it. For example, the text says we are to pray always and not faint. So you just repeat it. “What this means is we ought always to pray and not faint. Or, second, you might reword it, “We ought always to pray and not give up, to hold our ground in prayer.” We can reword it to explain what it means. The third way to explain what it means is to define it. So we can repeat it, reword it, and define it. This can also mean to show how it is developed. For example, “‘We ought always to pray and not faint.’ Now, the apostle Paul uses the word ‘always’...” Then you can tell how many times he uses that word and what he means when he uses that word and give a definition of what is meant. The fourth way to explain any text is to prove it. You show how, for example, the Greek word is in the present tense or how this is a past participle. You prove from the connection of words: “Paul uses the word ‘therefore,’ which indicates something causal or connected.” You prove it. You are pointing to grammar or to some connection or phrasing to prove that what is being said is there. Now, in terms of explaining the passage, you owe no more to explanation than what is required for people to understand it. Thus, when you preach and want to say, “We ought always to pray and not give up,” once you realize people understand, they know what you are trying to say, then move on. Move on. You do not need to keep belaboring an explanation if people have already understood. If they already understand what you are trying to say, then move on. Move on to further application or illustration or the explanation of another point. Thus, we only explain as much as is needed for someone to understand. Why? Because we only have a 20- or 30-minute timeframe. We will probably have a Bible study coming up, and the following Sunday, and the following Sunday, and the following Sunday to continue to open the Word for people. We do not have to get everything in to sermon at one point and one time. We explain as much as is needed for that day and that time with that passage.

Finally, we use communication tools to keep it simple. First, we determine how we can best say something. When Dr. Chapell talks about the FCF and mutual human condition, he talks about swiss cheese—cheese with holes in it. God provides for the holes in our lives. He equips the man of God for every good work from the Word so that he may be complete. Without that equipping from the Word, we are incomplete, like swiss cheese with holes. So we wrestle to try to find a way to say it so people can understand it. Second, we exegete our listeners as well as our text. We will talk much more about this in other homiletics classes, but I want to introduce it now. Exegete your listeners as well as the text. What ages are they? What occupations do they have? What interests do they have? What socioeconomic classes do they come from? Where do they get their news? What radio do they listen to? What do they read? What have their life experiences been? What is it that shapes the way they think and hear as we

preach to them? As we know them, it enables us to be smart in keeping things simple. It helps us to know how to communicate what the Word is saying to people in light of where they are and who they are.

To conclude, what we are saying in all of this is this: once you know what the text is saying, what the context is, what the situation was, what the words mean, you are only halfway done. At that point, you see, there has to be meditation on why the Word was written to those people and what that has to do with us today. And so we ask the question, "So what?" And we ask the question, "What is the mutual human condition between us and those in the text?" And we ask the question, "How do I best communicate the meaning to these particular people I am talking with on this particular occasion?" Once we have done those things, you see, then we are getting closer to having our sermon ready to present before God's people. Thus, after determining *what* a text means, it is important to determine *why* we need it, *how* we apply it, and to *whom* we are speaking. It is in this way that we can rightly divide God's Word. It is in this way that when we preach the Word we can wisely bring correction, rebuke, and encouragement, with longsuffering, according to what the Word of God has to say to people in their time and place. Let us pray together.

*Father, we thank You for our time together today. We ask that You would continue to teach us, Lord, continue to take what has been introduced today. Use it like seeds planted, and day upon day, week upon week, year upon year, would You begin to bring these seeds to bloom in the lives of each one here according to their calling, with Your Word. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

## **Outlining and Arrangement**

Let us do some review questions. What are six critical questions for sermon preparation? The first three are “What does it mean?” “How do you know?” and “What concerns caused it to be written?” Those are the first three. The final three are the three critical questions that turn a lecture into a sermon. They are “What do we share in common with those to whom and about whom it was written?” “How should we respond?” and “How can we best communicate these aspects?” These questions help us convert our message from informational to transformational. That is the critical turn, from dispensing information to actually ministering to people.

Something else to remember from the last lesson, taught by a guest professor, Dr. Eswine, is “You owe nothing more to exposition than what is necessary to make the point, but no less than what is necessary to prove the point.” In other words, as you answer those six questions, you will get much information. Then the question becomes, “How much do I dump on people? How much can I get out here?” You have to say only enough to make the point, but you cannot say less than what is necessary to prove the point. Where people usually begin to be bored and tune out what you are saying is when you have made the point, proven the point, and just keep proving it, and proving it, and proving it—because you read so much more Greek commentary on it. We should ask, “What is the most efficient way I can make and prove the point?” rather than just giving more and more and more information. For example, if it is clear in the English that a verb in the verse is a completed action, I do not think you need to also point out that it is a Greek aorist. Does that make sense? Now, if it is not clear in the English that it is a completed action, then you may need to point out, “In the Greek language, this is a completed action, and we call that an aorist verb.” I would say that most of the time you do not need to say that. Ask, “Is it clear so that people can understand?” You need to keep going until you prove your point. But once it is proven, you do not need to keep going. Let us pray.

*Father, we enjoy even the idea that there is a certain challenge in accumulating information. But even in our own hearts we recognize what the goal is, and we ask for Your blessing. The goal is that we would be prepared to proclaim Your Word to Your people, and that our minds, and even our hearts in our humanity would not just focus on the grade. What we are about is the Gospel. Help us to prepare for that above all things, that those who are in darkness would know Your light, those who are hungry would receive Your bread, those who are thirsty would receive living water—and may it even be from us. Grant that we would be faithful to Your Word above all things, we pray. Equip us for it, we ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

If you were following some of the wonderful things Dr. Eswine said last time, you understand that there are basic features of good outlining. We now need to begin work on those basic features, to take the information that comes out of those six questions in preparing a sermon and move that into an outline form from which we will preach. Thus the goal of this lesson is to understand the basic features of good outlining. The key thought today is that outlining provides structure for the truth to be related. It is important that you know that every passage does not have to be preached the same way. That seems strange, since it is the same truth. Yet, if you go to two churches to hear 1 Corinthians 2 preached, they would probably use very different outlines, different illustrations, and different applications even though (hopefully) both pastors are preaching truth from the same passage. You might say, “How can that be? If they are outlining correctly, will it not always be the same sermon?” Well, think about it for a moment. If you were going to a hardware store to prepare to do some construction, you would say there are all the same materials that any carpenter can work with, right? There are two-by-fours, dry wall, hammers, and nails—it is all the same raw material. Will the construction all look the same? You say, “No, it could be

quite different.” Even though it is the same raw materials, why will the construction vary? What will make it different? The purpose for which the constructor is building will change the way he uses the raw material. What will determine the purpose of the builder? The needs for the people will call for the raw material to be constructed according to what they need. But the raw material will be the same. Now, we will be using two terms that I want you to learn. One is the “exegetical outline.” That is the raw material. The exegetical outline is where you go through the text to look at the grammar and structure, and you simply outline the exegetical outline. You are doing exegesis, figuring out the material that is there. But the exegetical outline is in essence the raw material. It tells you what you need to know in order to construct the “homiletical outline.” This is the sermon outline.

Tell me things that are not in the exegetical outline (simply outlining the text) that will be in the homiletical outline. Often the exegetical outline will not answer the question, “How are you supposed to respond (particularly in your situation)?” It will not have that material, which we know is essential to good sermons: “How do you respond in your situation?” That will not be in the exegetical outline. What other things will not be in the outline of the passage? Illustrations will not be there. What else will not be there? Supporting texts may not be in the exegetical outline. Supporting text are various supporting materials that are not in the text you are studying, but, depending on your purposes, you may need to bring them in from other parts of Scripture. What other things will not be in the exegetical outline? The context may not be there. The context includes the historical context, what else was going on during the time of the passage. For example, where was Paul when he wrote this? That will not be in the exegetical background. Context includes historical background, and it also includes literary background. We have said that you will mistake what Romans 15 is about if you do not know what Romans 14 is about. Thus, if you only outlined Romans 15, you may not have the appropriate literary background. Now, you will have to ask, “How do I know what context will be appropriate? How will I know what information to bring in, what supporting texts to bring in, what illustrations to use, and what applications to use?” What is the ultimate question? We do not only exegete the text, but we also exegete the people. It is those two things in cooperation with each other that will form the blueprint for the homiletical outline for the construction of the sermon. The exegetical outline is the raw material. The homiletical outline is the fruit of exegeting the text and exegeting the people. Therefore, the form will follow function to some degree.

Let us see how it works with a few examples. Here is the key thought, before we look at these examples: expository messages are obligated to provide the truth of the passage but not necessarily the pattern of the passage. They are obligated to present the truth of the passage, but not necessarily the pattern of the passage. If you have a Bible, look at Luke 18. Can you be faithful to the truth of the text but not necessarily follow the pattern of the text? I will read Luke 18:1-8:

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she will not eventually wear me out with her coming!’ And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Could you preach from this that we do not pray enough, that we should be encouraged to pray more? Would that be an appropriate theme to preach from this text? It seems pretty clear that that would be a possibility. What if I approached it this way, though? What if I said, “We do not pray enough” as the fallen condition focus (FCF)? (Notice it is stated in the negative. The FCF is something that is wrong, it is the burden of the passage). “We do not pray enough.” Thus my outline might begin, “Pray because prayer is an indication of the believer’s faith. Pray because prayer reaches God’s heart. Pray because God commands it.” Where does that first point come from? “Pray because prayer is an indication of faith.” Where does that come from in the text? It is in the last verse. What about the next point, “Pray because prayer reaches God’s heart,” where does that come from? It comes from the middle of the text, verses 5 and 6—if even the unjust judge would be moved by pleading, how much more would God be moved with the pleading of His own. How about this one, “Pray because God commands it”? Where do we find a simple command to pray? It is in verse 1. Now, we moved backward through the text, did we not? But we are still dealing with the idea that we should pray because we do not pray enough, and we kind of build from the lesser to the greater, right? We say, “Pray because it is an indication of your faith” and “Pray because God hears.” But ultimately, why should we pray? “Pray because God says to.” Therefore I end with the imperative that the passage begins with. That is one approach.

What if my FCF were different because I recognize the people I am dealing with, their struggles and needs that I am aware of as a pastor? The FCF could be “We doubt God hears us when He does not answer immediately.” Would that be legitimate from this text? Was Jesus dealing with this? Yes, as He says, “You should pray and not worry because God will hear and He will answer quickly.” So if your people are saying, “He does not seem to hear,” could you address that concern, that fallen condition from this text? Yes, you could. Now we have a different purpose, with the same raw material. How would we deal with it, then? We could begin with these main points: “Do not doubt, because God desires our example of persistent prayer,” “Do not doubt, because God tells us some requests will not be met except by persistent prayer,” and “Do not doubt, because God will answer persistent prayer.” Where does the first one, “Do not doubt, because God desires our example of persistent prayer,” come from? Where do you get that from the text? That comes from the beginning. How about “Do not doubt, because God tells us some requests will not be met but by persistent prayer”? That comes from the middle. And where does “Do not doubt, because God will answer persistent prayer” come from? We see this toward the end, in verses 6-8, in Jesus’ conclusion. This time, what are we doing? We are moving right through the passage. We go straight from beginning to end. Now, we are being, I hope, true to the truth of the text, but we are not necessarily following the pattern of the text. I will tell you, I think the most frequently appropriate and best way is to go straight through. I would do that most of the time. I would move straight through, in order. But there may be strategies that are significant for communicating the truth of the text that may vary as to whether or not you follow the pattern.

Here is a key: when you are in a written medium, when you are writing an essay, for example, where do you say the most important thing? You state your theme statement, your thesis, first. That is typical of a written medium. You say the main thing, and then you move down to the particulars. When you are in an oral medium, when do you say the most important thing that you want people to walk away thinking about? You say it last. Remember, we said we need to learn some of the differences between essays and sermons. To be fair to the truth of the text, if the most important thing is said first, when might you choose to say it in the sermon? To be true to the truth of the text, you might say it last. To be fair to the truth of the text, you will devise a strategy that best communicates the truth. Transferring from a written medium, you may need to realize, “There are certain things I need to adjust in an oral medium.”

If that logic does not persuade you, here is another reason it could be best to change the order of the text when you preach it. If you are preaching from Ephesians 3, you will recognize that Paul starts, and then has a 12-verse long parenthesis before he comes back to the thought of the first verse. Do you think you would want to preach that text in that pattern or a different pattern? You have to recognize that you could completely lose people in an oral medium if you start a thought, exegete 12 verses, and then finish the thought. My guess is that you will find a different oral strategy to deal with that written information. Your exegetical outline will tell you, "Here is the beginning of the thought, here is the end of the thought, and there is much in between." But you will probably not preach that exegetical outline. You will probably have to convert it to a homiletical outline. You will find that some of the psalms are acrostics built on the Hebrew alphabet. Sometimes, as in Psalm 119, they might repeat verses seven or eight times before moving to the next letter. Do you think you can do that well in an English, oral medium? It can be very hard. You will probably find another way to orally communicate the truth of the text rather than follow the pattern.

Now, I want to go back and say that most of the time I think it is best to follow the pattern. But I do not want you to come to a passage where the pattern is difficult to follow and think, "Oh no, I cannot see how to follow the pattern, but I have to follow the pattern!" It is fine to sometimes not follow the pattern of a passage. The expositor's obligation is to the truth of the text, not necessarily to the pattern of the text. This is because our purpose drives pattern, but it does not determine truth. Do you hear the difference? Our purpose drives pattern, but it will not determine truth.

Think of the purpose of the outlines themselves. The rather classic statement from homiletical books for centuries in the West is "An outline is a logical path for the mind." This is pretty simple. If I want to tell you how to get somewhere, I will not just tell you, "Go east." I will say, "You take this street to this other, go south on this highway..." I will tell to go from here to there to there in order to show you how to get to the destination. I will create a logical path to get to where I am telling you to go. An outline is a logical path for the mind, and, like directions, it has steps in it.

There are two purposes of outlines. The first purpose for an outline is that it clarifies parts of the sermon in the listener's mind and ear. It provides a logical path to the mind, by clarifying parts of the sermon in the listener's mind and ear. Thus by what the listener hears, he or she gets the path to the truth we are developing. The second major reason preachers have outlines is because they clarify parts of the sermon in the preacher's mind and eye. I am, right now, speaking to you from an outline. I see a major point, then I begin to see the supporting material under it. I sometimes circle things I will use as illustrations while I am talking to you. I expect you to pick up the steps, but the mere fact that I have created an outline helps me while I am speaking to note the major thought, supporting thoughts, illustrations, and how I will apply it. My outline communicates that to me. I have spoken enough from outlines that I will recognize that if there are large gaps, there is something missing that I need to include. The creation of the outline itself gives signals to me as a speaker as to what to say, what to include, and in what sequence to do that. Thus while the outline is great for the listeners, it also helps me organize my thoughts by giving my eye signals about what I will be saying.

As you think about outlines, here is a thought of why we organize along a frame. As you aid the listener's ear and your eye, you are ultimately working hard on *ethos* as well as *logos*. You are working on *logos* because you are working hard on an argument. You are proving something is true. How is *ethos* helped by the outline? It indicates that you are credible, that you are thinking. It shows you cared enough to get organized. Those are the two pieces of *ethos*, right? *Ethos* is credibility and compassion. You show



credibility from organization because it indicates you know what you are talking about, you can put thoughts together, you have analyzed this text. You show compassion from organization because it indicates you care enough to put it in an organized way. It is interesting—outlines accomplish many things for us, not just in organization but also in *ethos*.

What are qualities of good homiletical outlining? There are five. The first quality of a good homiletical outline is unity. A sermon is about one thing, and therefore all the parts of the outline should support one central idea. You do not want to be in the position of a pastor who, in the middle of point number two, realizes that point number three misses the point entirely. You want to make sure each point deals with the point of the message. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. That does not work when the points of your outline do not deal with the main thing. Thus unity is something you would expect outlines to reflect.

A second quality of good homiletical outlines is brevity. That is, the parts will pass the 3:00 AM test. We want to say things in outline form as concisely as possible. You know that if you have a main point that goes on for 15 words, it is far too long. If it goes on for more than seven or eight words, it is probably too long. We want to shrink these things down. Now, we have much more to say—much more to say! But that will be the information, the exposition that comes under the main point statement. The main point statements and the subpoint statements we try to make as brief as possible. They are kind of like “thought pegs” that you hammer on the door, and then you can hang many things on them. But we do not want the peg to be 10 feet long. We want that peg to be as concise as possible, and then we can hang many things on it. Sometimes we will say things so briefly that people may think, “What? What did he just say?” For example: “What God needs is spoilers.” People may think, “What? What does that mean?” Well, you almost want that reaction. “God wants spoilers. He wants those who are willing to spoil the wicked.” I will explain that more and more as I go, but I want the concise statement first to get people’s attention, to let them know, “Here is what I will be talking about.” And then I can hang many things on that thought peg. Thus a quality of good homiletical outlines is brevity: the parts will pass the 3:00 AM test.

The third quality may be a new thought for you: parallelism. Good homiletical outlines reflect parallelism. That is, the word order between the main points—and even between subpoints within a main point—is similar. Think of it this way: “Christ’s word demands honor. Christ’s word demands obedience. Christ’s word demands love.” These could be three main points in a sermon. The modifiers line up in the same position in each statement. The subjects line up in the same position in each statement. Even the verbs are in the same position. In this case it is the object that keeps changing. That is known as the “key word change.” When things remain parallel but something changes, it is known as a key word change. What does everyone know the first of these three main points will be about? It will be about honor. What will the second and third main points be about? Obedience and love. Parallelism with a key word change is like a verbal flag from the speaker. Remember, people are not reading with you, they are listening to you. Key word changes are verbal flags saying, “Hey! Here is another main point!” The parallelism is a signal that it is another main idea, similar to another one that was stated earlier, maybe three, five, or even seven minutes previously. But the parallel language says, “Here is another main idea.” And its development is indicated by a key word change.

Where do you see Jesus doing this? In the Sermon on the Mount. There are two ways parallelism is demonstrated in the Sermon on the Mount. Do you remember anything that was parallel in the way Jesus stated things in the Sermon on the Mount? The beatitudes are parallel: “Blessed are the poor...for they will be... Blessed are the meek...for they will be...” Do you hear the first parallelism? “Blessed are

the...” This is followed by a key word change: “poor,” “meek,” etc. Then the latter part of each beatitude is also in parallel form. “Blessed are the poor in spirit for they will be... Blessed are the meek for they will be...” Thus we have parallelism with key word changes in the beatitudes. There is another way in the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus uses parallelism to indicate subject change. “You have heard it said...but I say to you...” Each time He moves to a new subject, He begins with a parallel statement with a key word change.

So this is not some new, modern innovation. This is the way people have heard things throughout the ages. The way in which we give them our outline is parallel phrasing with key word changes. We will look at more examples later. By the way, does the key word change always have to come at the end of the phrase? No, it can be in the middle or the beginning. And does it have to be just one word that changes? No, it will vary. But it is the form of parallelism with some shift in it that is a quality of good outlines. We will talk at various times about doing those key word changes. But we basically want some shift that causes people to say, “That is the main idea again...oh, and there is the shift.” That is what the key word change is about.

So far we have unity, brevity, parallelism, and now we add proportion. Another quality of good homiletical outlines is proportion. Some of the readings you will do will call this simply “symmetry.” Proportion, or symmetry, is the proportion of similar components of the message should be about equal. The main points are about the same length. If you have multiple subpoints, they are about the same length. Think what would happen otherwise. If your first main point lasts 25 minutes, you know the next main point will only last three minutes. Nonetheless, if you have been preaching for 25 minutes and then say to people, “And my second main point is...” what will the people think? “Oh no! He will be talking another 25 minutes!” This is because the Western ear expects things to be in proportion. Again, no one has a stopwatch on. But we do expect the components to be in roughly equal proportions.

The last quality is progression, meaning the thought should move forward with each component. We should move toward greater understanding, broader understanding, of what has been said. If we feel like we are stuck in the same place and have not moved forward, we may think, “It does not seem like anything happened to move us along.” Let us use the three main points we saw before, “Christ’s Word demands honor. Christ’s Word demands obedience. Christ’s Word demands love.” If instead of this I said first, “Christ’s Word demands honor” and then said, “For my second point, ‘Christ’s Word demands praise,’” what will people be thinking? “It is a different word, but it seems like we just talked about that.” It does not seem that there is progression.

Here is where you will often develop a difficulty with an exegetical versus a homiletical outline. Will a text ever repeat something? Sure it will. And if you are just following through the exegetical outline, you might speak about honor, then find that honor is repeated later and have to speak on that again. If a word or concept is repeated, what will you likely do? You will probably group them together under the same point rather than dealing with it, applying it, and so forth, only to come to it a few verses later and do it all again. I will try to pull ideas together in a way that explains the text in an oral medium. That means there will be parallelism, symmetry, proportion, and also progression.

Let us look at some types of homiletical outlines. We will do this very quickly, but I want you to know there are some different ways homiletical outlines can be put together. The most common one, and the one we will most frequently use, is the logical type, a logical outline. It shows the logical development of the passage’s thought.

As an example, let us look at the following statements: “We should trust God because His nature is loving,” “We should trust God because His nature is all-knowing,” and “We should trust God because His nature is all-powerful.” What if I were dealing with the FCF of “People just are unwilling to trust God.” I would say, “Listen, you should trust God because His nature is loving.” But the objection to that is “Even if I trust Him to be loving, if God does not know what will happen next, it is not enough. God being loving is not a sufficient reason to trust Him.” Therefore you say, “The second main point is “You should trust God because His nature is all-knowing. He is loving, and He also knows what will happen and the consequences of everything.” Someone may respond, “While that helps me more, it is still not enough. I believe He loves me and knows what will happen, but if He cannot stop the truck from hitting my child, I still do not have reason to trust Him. Thus I have to say, “Not only is He loving and all-knowing, but He is also all-powerful. He can control all things. He is loving, He is all-knowing, and He can control all things according to His knowledge and according to His love—in ways that are eternal and beyond us, surely. But nonetheless, we can trust Him.” I am building in a progressive way the logic that runs through a passage. That is a logically developed message. When you preach from the epistles, and some of the psalms, logical development is the easiest way to go, and it is very, very common.

A second major form of outlines is sequential. That is, we show not the logical development but the chronological development of a passage. We show the chronological outline of a passage. For example, “Because God offers salvation, we must come to Christ.” “Because God offers salvation we must abide in Christ.” “Because God offers salvation we must testify of Christ.” What does that describe, “Come to Christ, abide in Christ, testify of Christ”? What chronology is that? It is the chronology of the Christian life. We come, we abide, and we testify. Thus that particular chronology is logical, but it also sequentially moves through what happens in someone’s life. Have you ever heard a sermon where someone says, “This is what happened in the life of David: obedient, disobedient, repentant.”? They may move through the life of David to show how we must respond to God. Something like that would be sequential.

Another major form of outline is (I will be giving you two terms here) picturesque or imagistic, a picture or image. Why do we need this for our culture today? Are we more linear, logical, or visual? Which are we more oriented toward? You would have to say that in this era (at least in the United States) we are very image-oriented. I will list for you here what I will even confess is an absolutely awful outline. But hopefully it will make the point well. “If we are to be effective fishers of men, we must use proper tackle”; “If we are to be effective fishers of men, we must go where the fish are”; and “If we are to be effective fishers of men, we must react when we get a nibble.” If you are a fisherman, that may mean a little something to you. But what am I doing? I am talking about the process of missions through a fishing analogy. I am bringing to mind people’s idea of some fishing experience of their life in hopes that they will understand. This is a terrible outline, though.

I will tell you, one of the best imagistic outlines I ever heard was by a seminary student who had been in the Air Force. His career in the Air Force was as a crash investigation specialist. He would investigate what happened when planes crashed. He went to the life of King Saul, and he said, “There has been a spiritual crash that happened in this man’s life. How did it happen?” And he took us through the steps of a crash investigation to say, “First we need to determine the point of impact. Then we need to determine whether it was pilot or mechanical error. Then we have to say, what steps do we take to avoid recurrence?” Now, could you explain the life of Saul that way? Sure you could. It is a pretty good outline: “Point of impact,” “Pilot or mechanical error,” “What steps can we take to avoid recurrence in our lives?” He uses an image and takes people through an image or picture process. You may have heard pastors do

this. Did Jesus ever do this? He said, “I am the vine, you are the branches,” “I am the light of the world,” “I am the bread of life.” He took images people are familiar with and tied them to spiritual truth in order to communicate what needs to be known. Thus this type of outline is called picturesque or imagistic.

I think with just knowing about the logical, sequential, and imagistic types of outlines you will have much of the raw material you will need for much of what we will do in this class. There are others, but these are some of the basic outlines. If you are dealing with the epistles, which is where many of the passages assigned in this class come from, what outline do you think you would mainly use? The logical outline. What goes into an outline? What are the components? We will be looking at each of these more later, but just to give you an idea of what we will continue to develop, let us look at them. There will be these various components: some indicator of introduction and conclusion, proposition, main points, subpoints, illustrations, and applications. There will be some indication of what the introduction is about and some indication of what the conclusion is about.

Thus the first thing that goes into outlines is some indication of introduction and conclusion. The second thing that goes into outlines is a proposition, the theme statement. What is the main thing this sermon is about? That is a proposition. Obviously, beyond the proposition there will be main points. Here is a main point: “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ in difficult situations.” Here is another main point: “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ to difficult people,” “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ despite our difficulties.” Now, those are longer for a reason we will talk about shortly. But I hope you see that even though they are long statements, they have key word changes. They are parallel with key word changes. Thus you know the first main point will be about difficult situations, the second main point will be about difficult people, and the third main point will be about our difficulties. You see that by the parallel language. You probably recognize that, in addition to the main points, there are various developmental features. Here is one of those: subpoints. Subpoints are the development of the logic of the main point. In addition to subpoints, there are illustrations that are indicated in the outline. In addition to the illustrations, there are applications that typically are indicated in the outline.

Something I said with some care just a minute ago was that subpoints are the development of the logic of the main point. I said it that way so that hopefully something begins to come to your mind, which is this: an illustration is not a subpoint, and an application is not a subpoint. Yes, they are supporting materials under the main point. But the subpoints are the development of the logic of the main point. They are typically developments of a principle of some sort. The illustrations will illustrate, demonstrate what the subpoints and the main point have been about. Thus illustrations are demonstration. The applications will apply what the subpoints have been about. But neither the illustrations nor the applications are subpoints. The subpoints are the development of the logic of the main point. You may, depending on how full your outline becomes, include transitions of some sort. Thus, for contents of good homiletical outlines, we have indicators of introduction and conclusion, proposition, main points, developmental features, and sometimes transitions. Throughout the rest of the course we will talk about each of those.

Now let us look at some developmental principles for good homiletical outlines. We said that the raw material gives us information we need, but purpose determines the actual construction of the message. You may wonder how many points you are supposed to use. The answer depends on your purpose.

In the history of preaching, there is a standard way we think about the number of main points in a sermon. Depending on if it is a three-point sermon, a two-point sermon, or a four-or more-point sermon, we tend to have certain expectations of what will be accomplished according to the different numbers of points.

This will vary greatly by culture.

For the Western ear, people who have been educated in Western culture, we tend to have certain expectations of what will be accomplished according to the different numbers of points in an outline. A three-point outline is known as “developmental.” That is, “This idea leads to that idea, which leads to a culminating idea.” This comes right out of Greek and Roman rhetoric and the idea of what a syllogism is. This is a reflection of the way we in Western culture became accustomed to hearing an argument: major premise, minor premise, conclusion. We develop a thought by moving to a culminative idea. A three-point outline often reflects that Western, syllogistic method. By the way, homileticians will always debate, “Where did the three-point sermon come from?” It is the most common in Western culture. I would say it is the most common because in Western culture we are typically more comfortable preaching out of the epistles than out of narratives. Narratives often will not follow a three-point, developmental form. But didactic passages will almost be able to develop that way. Thus we are often more comfortable with this logical development, which often folds into a three point outline. We often use minor idea, more major idea, most major idea. That is typically what a three-point sermon does. You can think of it as going up the mountain: start here, move up to here, move up to the highest perspective and most important idea. Even the language I gave you before of a sermon being progressive has the idea that you are moving to a higher culmination. And a three-point sermon accomplishes that very readily to a Western ear.

A two-point message has a slightly different purpose. It is not developmental but balanced. Two things typically are in tension, or balanced, to one another. There is hot and cold. There is inside and outside. There is earthly and heavenly. Do you hear these duos? Typically, one is in balance against the other, in some form of tension. If you do not have that tension in a two-point message (in Western culture), do you know what people will feel? They will feel that it is incomplete. “Did you forget the third point? Did you run out of time?” This is because, you see, the third point is really there. Do you know what it is? The third point is the tension between the two. Thus if there is not tension between the two, if they are not counter-balanced in some way, then it makes people feel that you have not communicated anything to them, or you just did not finish. We will do this frequently, and the apostle Paul certainly does it very readily. Paul uses duos between the flesh and the spirit, between the earthly and the heavenly, between the inside and the outside, between the old man and the new man. “Put on the new clothes, put off the old clothes.” He uses these duos. Typically in a two-point sermon as we move from the first main point to a second main point, we create the tension. We say, “Here is what we have been looking at, and now here is the flip side we will be looking at.” We do not expect people to simply figure out the tension. We tell it to them because they need that information to be able to tell how these two ideas play off of each other.

What about a four-or more-point sermon? It may be summative, meaning it gives you many ideas that are added up to create an overall impression. Summative can also be called additive (because you add this to this to this) or even catalog (because it gives you many ideas). Now, you are not moving up the mountain, typically, in a four-or more-point message. Each of these points has equal weight, but you need them all to develop the overall idea. I think the longest catalog I ever heard were the “14 attributes of a biblical preacher.” The pastor who preached that sermon probably was not saying that one was more important than the others. He probably wanted us to hear all of them. He was saying, “You need to hear all of these to get the big picture.” It was not minor premise to more major premise to most major premise, rather it was, “You need this, and this, and this...” If you go beyond four points, in this era and culture it is very hard for people to retain it. At four or five points, you are pushing the max. At seven, eight, or nine, you may leave impressions, but your hearers (again, in American culture) will not remember specifics. At 14,

you are really just giving the big picture, as your hearers are not likely to remember any of the specifics. Thus a four-or more-point sermon is summative, or additive.

Then there are, in American culture, one-point messages. These are simply called, as you might guess, “essay form.” It is simply an essay. The one main point is the proposition or theme statement, and it is developed pretty much like an essay. This is very hard for people to listen to in our culture. Thirty minutes with no breaks, no road signs in between, just paragraph leads to paragraph leads to paragraph... Think if you were listening to this sermon. Typically they are read; very few people have this memorized. By the way, one of the reasons we use outlines is because they are very easy to get into our heads so we do not have to read off a manuscript. We do use essays, and there are some fantastic essay preachers in our culture. Can you think of any preachers who present essays in sermons that are effective? Colson. I would certainly say Colson is an essay preacher. He gives wonderful, marvelous social essays. Usually these are not expository sermons, not taking a text and unfolding it. James Kennedy is the other essay preacher I would mention. These sermons are often essay forms rather than expositions. We will talk later about why that is—often an essay form is a way of addressing an issue, as opposed to developing a text. Thus there may be a reason for an essay sermon, but we will not do it this semester.

Another developmental principle for good homiletical outlines is the principles of subordination. Here I will follow in the tracks of your English teacher. If you have one subpoint, what must you have in addition? You must have another. You cannot have one subpoint under a main point. If you have one subpoint, what should it have been? It should have been the main point. If you have a main point statement and only one subpoint, it will seem to the listener that they are in competition. “What is the main point here? Is that a restatement of what you just said, or did I mishear you? Did you mean to state that instead of the main point?” Thus if you have one subpoint, you must have another. You must have at least two subpoints, if you have any at all. Can you have three subpoints? Sure. Can you have four? Sure. Can you have five? Oh, you are stretching it... Usually two or three subpoints is most common. You do not have to have subpoints. Maybe the main point will carry the thought in itself. But if you do have a subpoint, principles of subordination say you have to have at least one more. Typically there are two or three.

A third developmental principle for good homiletical outlines is that it is helpful to keep the text evident in the outline. As you develop homiletical outlines, it is often very helpful to use the words of the text. People will hear you say something, look at their Bibles, and see that you are using similar words. For example, if I said, “Christ’s Word demands honor,” and verse 2 had the word honor in it, that is very helpful to people. Now, can you always do that? The answer is no. It may be that the word “honor” did not appear in the text at all. It may have been something like “Give God praise, sing songs to him,” and I had to take two phrases and roll them into one main point. So, for example, “praise” and “sing songs,” what are those about? They are about giving honor. Thus I may have to take an entirely different word and use it as a summary word to get the biblical concepts. But if I can use the words of the text, that is often very helpful. It is good to keep the words of the text in the outline if I can.

The other thing I will do to keep the text evident in the outline is to tie main points and subpoints to relevant verses. That is how I keep the text most evident in my outline. If I cannot use the words of the text in my outline, I certainly will use the verse references. Think of how preachers develop this. They may say, “Christ’s Word demands honor. Look with me at verse 2; it says...” What I just did is a standard pattern. You state the truth (for example, “Christ’s Word demands honor”), then place the truth

(“Look with me at verse 2...”), and then prove the truth (“Verse 2 says this...”): state, place, prove. We will talk about various forms of proof as we go. What I often do in my outline is link the main points to the verses that they can be proven by. And if I have subpoints, I will link them to verses as well. So I will say something like, “We should give God honor. First this demands our praise—look with me at verse 3.” Then I will begin to explain how verse 3 explains praise. I may have another subpoint, “It also says, ‘Sing songs to him,’ ‘songs, and hymns, and spiritual songs,’ what are those things?” Then I will begin to explain what psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are. Then I may have something in addition. But what I am trying to do is to keep my main points and subpoints tied visually to the text. What is the strength of that? On whose authority do you speak? You speak on the Bible’s authority, not yours. Therefore I say, “Here is the truth, now look with me at the text.”

This does many things. It makes sure your authority comes out of the Bible, and it makes sure you are in fact explaining what the text says. You have to prove that what you just said comes out of the Bible here. Also, it does the expositor’s ethic. What do we do? We open our Bibles and say, “Let me tell you what this means.” And when I keep saying, “Look here, it says... Look here...” people will know that I am explaining what the text means. You keep taking them back to the text. One way to do this is to use the words of the text, though you cannot do that a lot of the time. Not only can you, but you must use the verses of the text. Identify the verse references.

A fourth developmental principle for good homiletical outlines is to create consistent visual markers in your pulpit outline. You know, what you take into the pulpit may not be what you have written up. It is often quite a bit more brief. Something I have done through the years to create consistent visual markers is when I have the outline I take into the pulpit, I always circle my illustrations. Why? Because then they are set off for my eye on what the subpoints are about. I work along and think, “I need to remember what the illustrations are,” and I just look down. I do not have to read through five sentences; the illustrations are circled. My eye falls immediately to them, so I automatically know what my illustration is. Before I became computer literate I almost always used little triangles to indicate my applications. Now I use a little parallelogram. When I see one of those, I know I am in an application. My eye is not trying to read, “Where is it?!” My eye just falls to the page, and I automatically know, “That is an illustration,” or I automatically know, “That is an application.”

Now, I do not mean to tell you what you should do. Our styles will vary hugely. But the thing to do while you are in seminary is to begin to develop your own system. What is helpful for you? Do you put a star by an application? Do you put a square over the illustration? Do you highlight the illustrations and applications in different colors? There the difficulty comes when you have 10 different colors, and you need a key on the side to be able to remember what each color stands for. That is really going too far. But the idea is to help me be able to maintain eye contact and speak to people. Having these consistent visual markers helps with that, among other things. Maybe you can make the major points boldfaced, larger, and over in the left-hand margin. Subpoints you might indent a little and make them smaller. This helps us know major ideas and minor ideas just by the way we put them on the page.

The fifth developmental principle for good homiletical outlines may surprise you. This is different, again, than what your English teacher told you. When we develop outlines for preaching, we typically number rather than alphabetize main points and subpoints. Let us say the main point is “1. Christ’s word demands praise,” and then I had subpoints here. My English teacher told me to use a, b, c, etc. But when you are talking to people, do you say “A...B...” No, you say, “First...Second...Third...” Thus in homiletical outlines we number rather than alphabetize, because that is the way we talk. Otherwise you will have to do some kind of conversion process in your brain, “Let us see: a, b, c...Third!” You will recognize the

unnaturalness of talking to people and doing this. We do not talk that way to one another. Thus it is often typical that we will number even subpoints as well as main points.

A sixth developmental principle for good homiletical outlines is to keep the main points in the pulpit outline clearly segregated. That seems plain enough. Our tendency is to cram things together. Again, we are thinking of essays rather than developing sermons. So, my first main point has gone about two-thirds down the page. Where do I start my second main point, if I am writing an essay? You just keep going down the page. But then some of your main points may be split between two pages. If you have sufficient paper, you could start each main point at the top of a new page. That way your eye does not have trouble navigating. “I finished that point, there is where the next one starts. Now I finished with that one, there is where the next one starts.” My eye is always coming to the same place on the page when I transition between points or major ideas. You could also just fold one page four times and have your introduction and each main point on a separate fold. People also use note cards—all kinds of things. My goal for you is to develop a consistent system, this way your eye will know what it is looking for and not be searching on the page. Then you can operate very quickly and efficiently. That is part of keeping the outline seeable.

Another hint is that highlighting or underscoring key word changes while keeping most of the wording parallel aids greatly in many ways. Going back to this rather silly outline, “Christ’s Word demands honor,” “Christ’s Word demands obedience,” and “Christ’s Word demands love,” If I highlight or underline “honor,” “obedience,” and “love,” my eye will go automatically to those words, and I will immediately know what each main point is about. Also, I will emphasize it with my voice, which makes it stand out to people.

Again, these are hints for the pulpit outline, what you take into the pulpit with you. This may be far different from the sermon outline you wrote in preparation for the pulpit outline. I write out my sermons word for word. But I never take the manuscript into the pulpit. I write it out word for word to get my brain and heart ready for what I will say. But I do not want to use a manuscript, because I will end up reading to people. I am talking about now what you take into the pulpit. I think the standard process for many preachers in our culture is exegetical outline, homiletical outline, manuscript, pulpit outline. It is four steps: exegetical outline, homiletical outline, manuscript—write your whole sermon out—and then pulpit outline, convert the manuscript to a pulpit outline. This is a lot of work, but it makes our preaching something that people can listen to and something that is easy to understand.

I also have some cautions for homiletical outlines. There are three. The first you already know: take out the “not’s.” A possible outline of Luke 18 is “Do not doubt, because God desires our example of persistent prayer,” “Do not doubt, because God tells us some requests will not be met but by persistent prayer,” and “Do not doubt, because God will answer persistent prayer.” Now, if you did not have the full explanation of those, if I left it at “Do not... Do not... Do not...” what have I left out of the sermon? What to do. “Do not do this... Do not do this...” I have left out what to do. This is a rule that we will only use as we learn the basics of preaching. We will break this rule later on. But for now, do not word main points in the negative. If I want to say not to do something, it is better to say, “Avoid...” rather than “Do not...” I will find another way to say it rather than putting it in the negative. That is something we will do this semester. We will get out of the habit of saying things in the negative by saying things in the positive.

The second caution is take out the passive verbs: “He was good...Christians are...” We will find an active verb. Make it active, make it gripping, take out the passive verbs. The third caution is use alliteration with caution. Alliteration is when your key terms all begin with the same consonant. For example, “Praise,”



“Power,” and “Plee,” or “Call,” “Come,” and “Convert.” You use some consonant in a pattern. This is a very powerful rhetorical tool. The ear is very much helped by it, particularly when preachers have picked up the importance of key word structures. Thus there are some preachers who use alliteration every week. Listen, this is a very powerful tool. If you use it every week, it can be problematic. Why? You begin to twist the text to fit your alliteration scheme. “It does not exactly mean that, but I have to use the same consonant word...” You end up kind of twisting the truth. The other thing is that people may find it too cutesy if you use it week after week after week. Now it becomes a word game rather than a proclamation of truth. It is a tool, but we will use it with caution. If it will work naturally, great. But if not, do not feel like you have to push it. Some of you are used to preaching that uses alliteration every week. I want to say, if it is natural, use it. If not, do not twist the text to make it happen. It is more important to say the truth than to say something untrue cleverly.

The bottom line for good homiletical outlines is be faithful to the text; what you say should be obvious from the text, it should be relevant to an FCF, and does it move toward a climax? You can make an acronym from this: FORM: Faithful to the text, Obvious from the text, Relevant to an FCF, and Move toward a climax. What you say should come from the text. It should be relevant to the FCF. I should ask myself, “This is the burden of the text; this is why I am preaching this! Is all the material of the sermon still dealing with that fallen condition, or have I gone down a rabbit trail?” I keep pointing back to that fallen condition. Is all of the supporting material, are all of the main points, dealing with the FCF? Does it move toward a climax? Conclusions carry the weight of the sermon. Have I said, “You must hear me now, this is what this is about.” This means all sermons have FORM: Faithful to the text, Obvious from the text, Relevant to an FCF, and Moving toward a climax. In the climax, how you are in essence trying to say, “This is what God is saying to you. You must act upon it.”? All sermons have FORM.

Now, these have been just basic criteria for outlines. I have tried to do two basic things: tell you what goes in an outline and give you some understanding that all your outlines will not look the same. Those are the two main things I have tried to accomplish today. The next task after looking at these general principles is to, next time, look at the particulars of formal propositions and main points.

## **Propositions and Main Points**

Let us go over some review questions. Is there only one proper way to outline a passage for a sermon? The exegetical outline may be very similar, but what will vary greatly? The homiletical outline may vary greatly. Part of the reason for that is an expositor is bound to represent the truth of a text but not the pattern of a text. You are bound to represent the truth of the text as an expositor but not necessarily the pattern of the text. What then governs how a sermon should be outlined? Your purpose and fallen condition focus (FCF). If there is not one right way to use that material out of an exegetical outline in your other study, what does govern the outline? The purpose and the FCF.

There are three basic types of outlines. What is the most common? Logical outlines. What others are there? Sequential or chronological and picturesque or imagistic. So, the three types of outlines are logical, sequential, and picturesque. What are the qualities of good homiletical outlines? They include unity, brevity, parallelism, proportion, and progression. Also, remember FORM, the little acrostic. They should have FORM—“faithful to the text, obvious from the text, relevant to a fallen condition focus, and moving to a climax.” Those are just summary thoughts from the last lesson.

In this lesson we will be talking about basic principles of outlining and moving to greater particulars. And I want to kind of prepare for this by sharing some heart experience that some of you are aware of. There is a very dear friend of mine and a friend of the seminary who has been missing for a couple of days now, and we think he has probably taken his own life. He is a pastor, a pastor to quite a few people who go to this seminary. As I spoke to his wife yesterday, I thought, what great truths can you communicate at such a time? In my mind the great truths are the simple ones. “He is the good Shepherd, and I will ask Him now to carry you close in His arms, close to His heart.”

We will do many technical things in the next few lessons. But I do not want the technical things to steal your sight of what we are trying to accomplish. We are just trying to make God’s word clear to God’s people. There are some technical things about communication that we need to learn, and we need to do that well. But do not lose sight of the goal. We are not trying to make things more complex. We are trying to make the Word of God in all of His eternal truths crystal clear for His people. Let us pray that the Lord would enable us to do that.

*Father, we will deal with matters in this class on this day that are highly technical and, in some ways, as we are gaining facility in them, even frustrating to us. But the goal is great. The goal is that the hope that is in Your Word, that You have transferred through the ages, would be proclaimed to Your people with boldness and compassion and great clarity. For there will be moments in life where we will need it to be very, very clear to us. Grant us, therefore, as we do what we confess are some rather mundane tasks this day, a sight of the goal: Your people understanding Your word. Give us Your blessing, we pray for the sake of Your people and the message of Your Son. We pray in His name. Amen.*

Our goal for this lesson is to understand the basic features and constructions of good propositions and main points. If you think of this class in large scope, we have talked about the nature of the Word of God in general, we have talked about the nature of the servant of God, and we have talked about the nature of the text and what we are trying to communicate out of it. Now we are moving right into what is the nature of that sermon itself, and we are going to look at some of the skeleton. We are going to come right in and do that hard work of anatomy and begin to think particularly for formal messages. Now, we will not always preach formal messages but particularly for the most formal, classical messages, we will study what those outlines look like. I will readily confess to you that I do not always preach this way.

This is the most classical method; we are learning taxonomy. We are learning very basic things that we will now use in much greater ways and more facile ways in the future. But we will walk down this path for a while and recognize it is playing the scales before we get to jazz. This lesson is like learning the scales. I want to freely confess that to you, but once we have this terminology and these principles down, we can do lots of different things—that is the goal. As we think about it, recognize that after the overview we are now zeroing in on the detailed development of specific components of the homiletical outline.

First, what is a proposition? Now, the traditional definition is as old as John Broadus. The traditional definition of a proposition is “a statement of the subject as the preacher proposes to develop it.” This is pretty basic, right? Your English teacher would call it the theme statement. But for a sermon it is “a statement of the subject as the preacher proposes to develop it.” Now, that definition is over 150 years old, so let us talk about some additional developments in definition. We will add to that traditional definition some distinctions for what an expository message is, particularly framed according to classical guidelines. A proposition is also a theme statement indicating how an FCF will be addressed in the message. Thus it is not just a statement of the subject, but it is a statement of the subject addressed to the FCF. What is the burden of the message? What is wrong that you will be addressing? The theme is addressed to that problem, as it were, that this text speaks to.

Second, a proposition is a statement of the main thing the message is about. It is broad enough to cover the content of all the main points, and it is proven or developed by each of the points. Now, if you could imagine a stool, the proposition is the seat and the main points are the legs. The proposition has to be broad enough to cover all the legs (the main points), but it also has to be supported by the specific main points. So, the proposition is to cover and be supported by each of the main points. The main points should not be about something else; they are to be about this specific proposition.

Third, a proposition is a summary of the introduction and an indication of what the rest of the message will be about. Thus the proposition points both forward and backward. You can kind of think about it in the hourglass mode here. A proposition is a summary of the introduction, and in that way it is pointing back. The introduction also says, “Here is what I will be talking about: here is the problem, and here is how the text addresses it. Thus the proposition summarizes what the introduction has been about, but it also signals what the rest of the message will be about. The proposition is both a summary of the introduction and a preparation for the rest of the message.

A key idea to which we will return many times in this semester is this: the introduction prepares for the proposition in two major ways, in concept and terminology. On our hourglass again, if the proposition is kind of at the neck of the sermon, if the proposition is a summary of the introduction, then it will certainly use the concepts of the introduction. The introduction should get us ready to hear what the subject of the sermon is. But, again, we are in an oral medium. People are listening for what we say, and we need to give them cues, not just conceptually but even in the terms that we use in the introduction. Thus if in my introduction I talk about, “God is a friend to sinners,” then my proposition will be “God is kind to all people.” You may think, “Well, that is the same subject.” It is the same subject, said in different terms. As a result, the ear is now confused. So, unlike your English teacher who would say, “Use different words,” your homiletics instructor says, “Use the same words.” We are preparing the ear as well as the mind for what will follow. The introduction prepares for the proposition in concept and terminology.

Let us refine our definition of a proposition, then. A proposition is this, going back to the classical definition: a statement of the subject as the preacher proposes to develop it. That is still true. A

proposition is a statement of the subject as the preacher proposes to develop it, with (in light of an FCF) the concepts and terms of the introduction.

That is the general definition. Now let us begin to talk about the marks of such propositions in the most formal structure, so in classical terms. The statement from Henry Jewitt is the one that virtually every homiletics book has quoted for the last half century. Over and over again, in a statement of what a proposition is, Jewitt says, “I do not think any sermon should be preached or written until that proposition has emerged clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.” This is good graphic language. The proposition should just shine there in the darkness of the text to say, “Here is what this message is about,” as clear as a cloudless moon. Now, we can begin to think about what that proposition includes by what we know the rest of the sermon will be about. Remember, we said a sermon is not just what is true, but it is also what to do about it. It is not just about what to do, because that is a kind of preacher arrogance, “Do this, do this, do this.” Nor is it just about what is true, because that is preacher abstraction. It is these two things together: what is true and what to do about it. Thus if the proposition is about all of those things, you might easily guess that it is going to be a wedding of a principle and an application or exhortation, which is also known as the application. Now again, that means that what is true, the principle, is wed to what to do, the exhortation or application. The formal way homileticians say this is “A proposition is a universal truth in a *hortatory* mode.” A proposition is something that is universally true, and I can exhort you on the basis of it. Because it has those two elements, what is true and what to do, principle and application, we recognize that a proposition is not principle alone. For example, “Jesus is the only hope of salvation.” That is a good statement, and it is all true. But it is not a proposition, because what is it lacking? It is lacking the application—it is just principle. Neither is a proposition just application alone, like, “We should preach Christ at every opportunity.” This is true and it is a great application, but the truth for it has not been established. So a proposition is principle wed to application. For example, “Because Jesus is the only hope for salvation, we must preach Christ at every opportunity.”

There are two basic forms of doing this. Here I will give you terminology to learn so we can use it later on down the road. There are two basic forms of presenting universal truths in hortatory modes. The first is a consequential form. The key word here is “because.” In this form you will say, “Because something is true, do this.” There is a causal effect between the principle and application. An example of the consequential form is “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ at every opportunity.”

The second major form is conditional. You are saying that, because some condition exists, there are necessary implications. The key words here are “if,” “for,” and “since.” In this form you will say, “If (or since) this condition exists, there are these implications.” For example, “If disciples are to preach Christ at every opportunity, then we must prepare to proclaim Him.” My first clause there, the principle, could also be “Since all are born in sin...” Do you hear the condition there? That is the condition in which people exist. “Since all are born in sin, then we must teach them the Gospel.” If all are in this condition, then what are the necessary implications?

I do not want you to try to solve all the questions about which to use at which time. Your ear will tell you. What I really want you to hear is that you have options. It could be “because,” it could be “if,” or it could be “since.” I just want you to hear the options and not wonder about which is the right one to use. If it sounds right to your ear, it will sound right to other people’s ears. So either “because,” “since,” or “if.”

There are many other ways of doing this wedding of what is true and what to do about it. We will concentrate this semester on these conditional and consequential ways of wording things just to learn some basic principles. The key thing, again, is to know your options: either the “because” statements or the “if” or “since” statements. These forms reflect our preaching commitment to preach in accord with biblical priorities. We want to preach truth and apply it to our lives. This is kind of what we have said from the beginning, right? “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Here are the applications, it is truth, it is inspired by God for these purposes, and we will try to preach it that way.

Now, those are propositions. You recognize we are not talking about propositions alone, but also good main points. So let us talk about good main points as well. First, what is the mark of a good main point? A good main point is, like the proposition, a universal truth in a *hortatory* mode. Main points are also universal truths in *hortatory* modes. That is, they are a wedding of principle and application. Just like propositions, good main points are also a wedding of principle and application. Here is Haddon Robinson, another of the classical writers on homiletics. Many seminaries use his book, as he is one of the sterling writers on homiletics. Here is how he does it in his book, *Biblical Preaching*. You will see here again some classical forms: “We should praise God because He has elected us in Christ.” Is this main point conditional or is it consequential? It is consequential. It uses “because” here in the middle rather than at the beginning, but it is still consequential. Which is the application? The phrase that comes before or after the “because”? The phrase that comes before, that is right. “We should praise God...” There is the application. The principle is here: “...He has elected us in Christ.” Thus this is a universal truth wed to an application by “because.” That is a truth and application in consequential form.

Now look at the parallelism happening in addition to these other things in his second main point, “We should praise God, because He has dealt with us according to the riches of His grace.” Is this conditional or consequential? It is again consequential. To have parallelism, you would have to use consequential again, would you not? So you know that if one main point is consequential, the rest will also be consequential. Otherwise your parallelism will fall apart. “We should praise God...” Which is the application, the first or last part of the statement? The first, “We should praise God...” And then we have a new principle: “...He has dealt with us according to the riches of His grace.”

His third main point is “We should praise God, because He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit until we acquire full possession of our inheritance.” Now, this last main point may have trouble passing the 3:00 AM test. If you were to cut it short, to give it some brevity, how would you do that? You could say, “We should praise God, because He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit.” You could then develop the rest of the original statement under that main point. What Haddon Robinson is doing here, of course, is simply quoting more of the verse. But if, for homiletical purposes, we wanted to make it more brief, we could put the period there and then talk about how the Holy Spirit seals us within the body of that main point. Do you notice that, in these three main points, the applications are the same? “We should praise God...” They are the same throughout the outline.

What kind of consistent message is this? This is an application-consistent message, because the application clause stays the same. Could you have a principle-consistent message? Yes, you could keep the principle consistent and change the other side. Do you have to start with the application? No, it could be on either side. Do you have to put the “because” in the middle? No, it could have been at the beginning. So we recognize there are variations, but what makes it consequential is that there is a “because” somewhere; what makes it a valid main point is that it has both truth and application; and what makes it application consistent is that the application is what is unchanged throughout the three main points. If the principle had stayed the same, it would have been principle consistent.

A student has asked how we make sure our proposition is broad enough to cover all of this? The proposition will have the same anchor clause, which will take care of the consistent clause. That is how it will cover that. The proposition will have the same consistent element. The developing clauses we will call the magnet clauses, the ones that are changing and therefore drawing attention to themselves (that is why we call them magnet clauses—they draw attention to themselves). For these clauses that change, you will need to have a proposition conceptually large enough to cover them. If we were to create a proposition for Haddon's three main points, we know "We should praise God" will be part of it. That will stay the same; we know that is the first part of our proposition. The changing or magnet clauses are "He has elected us in Christ," "He has dealt with us according to the riches of His grace," and "He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit." Can you think of a clause that is broad enough for that? "We should praise God because..." what? We could say, "We should praise God, because He has accomplished our salvation." And then I say, "How did He do that? He elected us in Christ, dealt with us according to the riches of His grace, and has sealed us with the Holy Spirit." Thus we have a conceptual entity that is broad enough to cover all the developing clauses. We will need to create a proposition that is enough of an umbrella that it will cover conceptually the main points that come beneath.

Another mark of good main points is that they are parallel. The language lines up. They are parallel in their wording. Another mark of good main points is that they are progressive. We do not say the same thing over again. In fact, typically, we move forward to greater and greater concepts. Thus we are progressing in our understanding and not standing in the same place.

The next three items I will mention about main points all apply to the application clause specifically. The first three qualities I just mentioned—that good main points are universal truths in *hortatory* mode, they are parallel, and they are progressive—apply to all portions of every main point. But these next three things I will mention apply only to the application clause.

The clause is first positively worded. Do you remember how we said this last time? You take out the "not's." This semester, we will not word our main points in negatives, "do not..." You may say, did not the Lord set a different precedent when He gave the Ten Commandments? Then I will say, well yes, but you are not in that position yet. We will learn by taking out the "not's" and try to word things in the positive—what people should do rather than what they should not do. The application clauses of good main points will also be actively worded. Take out the "be's." Take out all the "being," all the passive verbs. We will word them actively. The last thing for the application clauses is that we will seek to word them as "you" or "we." Now, technically that is wording them in either the first or second person plural. "What should you do?" "You must do something" or "We must do something."

I have already been down this path a little with you. Homileticians, especially classical ones, debate this: should you say "you" or "we"? What are the advantages? If you say, "you," what is the power of that? It is very directive. Do you have the authority to say to people, "You should do something..."? Do you have the authority to do that? On what authority can you do that? Not on your authority, but on the Word's authority. You can, with the authority of the Word of God, say, "You must stop, this is not the way Christians live." Do you have the ability to say "we"? "You" communicates great authority. What is the advantage of using "we"? It communicates community identity. It is identifying with people. At times, do you need to identify with people? At times, do you need to confront people? The answer to both is yes. Again, I do not want to say using one or the other is right or wrong. Rather, I will use that great word of judgment, "pastoral prudence." As a pastor, knowing what the Word says and who your people are, which is most appropriate? Sometimes you will need to say "you," and sometimes you will need to say "we." "We are really struggling with Greek today, some of us in this community." And sometimes I need to say to people, "You must stop entertainments that are hurting your heart as you

prepare to proclaim God's Word to God's people." Sometimes I need to say "you." And the same will be true for you many times down the road.

So, those are our options, and they work well in the application clause. Is that clear? The first three qualities I mentioned for main points apply to everything in the main point: principle and application, parallelism, and progression. And the last three things—taking out the "not's," taking out the "be's," and using either "you" or "we"—apply to the application clause only.

How do we harmonize these things, propositions and main points? Keep the wording of the proposition and the main points parallel. How do we make sure we are keeping things together so that this message has unity? Let us look at an outline that is principle consistent, in consequential form: "Because Jesus commands believers to obey Him boldly, we must proclaim Christ at every opportunity." Now, I hope when you see a classical form you already recognize one test it may have trouble passing. What is it? Any classically worded main point or proposition does have trouble passing the 3:00 AM test. It is just a lot of words. Ultimately we will move beyond this, but we will learn the classical form, because it does something. It teaches us basic hermeneutics even before we have had the rest of the curriculum.

In other classes, such as New Testament Introduction and Biblical Hermeneutics, we will talk about how you take something that is true and turn it into an imperative. That is always a difficult step biblically. "Jesus told His disciples to go into all the world, so you should go into all the world." "Jesus and His disciples wore sandals, therefore..." Well, why is one an imperative and the other not? Why does one truth lead to an imperative and the other does not? You are kind of forced to wrestle with that already, by wording main points and propositions with a truth and application. This forces us, before we have been trained in many principles that will come down the road, to begin to look at a text with basic hermeneutical principles in mind and allow us to proclaim truth accurately and boldly for God's people.

So, what do we do? In a proposition, we will make one side of it become the same with the same side in the main points. For example, "Because Jesus commands believers to proclaim Him boldly, we must proclaim Christ at every opportunity." This is the proposition, and that last section is the overarching portion. The parallel phrase and anchor clause is "Because Jesus commands His believers to proclaim Him boldly..." Thus your first main point could be "Because Jesus commands His believers to proclaim Him boldly, we should proclaim Christ in difficult situations." Again, that last section is the key word change, right? This is what changes: "...we should proclaim Christ in difficult situations," "...we should proclaim Christ to difficult people" (second main point), and "...we should proclaim Christ despite our difficulties" (third main point). These three last sections are all about how we should "proclaim Christ at every opportunity," which was the overarching clause of the proposition. In this particular case, the principle stays the same, and thus it is a principle-consistent outline. The clause that changes is the application, and therefore it is the magnet clause, the one that draws attention to itself. Ultimately we will say the subpoints, applications, and illustrations are about the magnet clause, the clause that changes. This is because that is what the ear focuses on because it is different. That is what you have to talk about, what you said that was different. That will draw much attention to itself.

What would an application-consistent outline look like? Let us look at an application-consistent outline that is in consequential form. Here is the proposition, "Since Jesus alone provides salvation, we must proclaim Christ to the world." Then the first main point is "Since Jesus alone purchased salvation..." Notice here the changing clause is at the beginning, while the anchor clause is the second—it is the application. "...we must proclaim Christ to the world" occurs in the proposition and each of the main points, and that is an application. We must do something. Thus it is an application-consistent outline. And what changes is the reason for that same application. What is one reason for that application?

“Jesus alone purchased salvation.” What is another reason? “Jesus alone possesses salvation.” What is another reason? “Jesus alone bestows salvation.” So the application is consistent, but the principle changes. You are saying, “Here is reason to do this thing. Here is another reason to do the same thing. Here is another reason to do the same thing.” It is application consistent with a change of principle. Again, here it is in conditional form.

Keep one side of the proposition consistent in main point development. Not only do we have parallelism in the points, but also one side (either principle or application) stays the same, it is consistent. The side of the proposition that stays consistent in the outline is called the anchor clause. If the principle of the proposition becomes the anchor clause, what kind of outline is this? If the principle is the anchor clause, it is a principle-consistent outline. If the application of the proposition becomes the anchor, this is application consistent. We keep the non-consistent clauses of the main points as parallel in wording as possible except for key word changes. Thus even in the clause that changes, we will still try to line up the verbs, subjects, and objects. We will try to line them up as well as we can, but something will be changing, and of course those are the key word changes. The non-consistent side of the main points is each main point’s developmental component, also called the magnet clause. It draws attention to itself. The magnet clause is what the exposition of the main point supports or develops. The magnet clause draws or attracts the exposition to itself, which is why it is called the magnet clause. Thus the subpoints of each main point develop or support that main point’s magnet clause.

Something seems to be missing, then. When will we ever deal with that anchor clause? When do we ever explain how that is true or how that got there? Well, we also establish the truth of the anchor clause. We establish the truth of the anchor clause early, just before or just after the proposition. Usually it is in the introduction that we establish the truth of the anchor clause. But occasionally it can be established toward the beginning of the first main point. The early establishment of this premise is necessary since the whole sermon rests on the adequacy of the anchor clause. The proposition, at the neck of the sermon (if we think of it as an hourglass), will be based on what was developed in the introduction and prepares for everything that follows. Typically that means the anchor clause is something rather apparent, rather taken for granted. This is because you do not have much time to explain it. It should be something fairly obvious from the passage. Occasionally it will not be. So if you do not have time to explain it in the introduction, you will need to do it right after the proposition, usually very early in the first main point. Otherwise, the sermon does not have the foundation you need to follow. Thus if I were to say, “We must proclaim Christ at every opportunity,” I will also say, “Here Jesus says to take the Gospel to all nations. Everyone needs to hear this.” This is something rather obvious there in the text. But if my first anchor clause is something like, “God elects us by grace alone,” that may need some further explanation to establish it. I may have to do a little more on that. That may even be too difficult to handle as an anchor clause. That may need to be in a developmental clause—that may even take the whole sermon to develop. But if I cannot just say it quickly, and I still want it to be the anchor clause, I should be able to explain it fairly quickly in either the introduction or at the beginning of the first main point. This is because it is the developmental clauses that I will talk about in the rest of the sermon. Therefore the anchor clause should be fairly clear early in the message. Almost always we can get the anchor clause (if properly chosen) explained before the proposition even appears. Then people can say, “Of course, that is what you said you are talking about, I see that, I know what we will be talking about.”

Someone has asked if it is merely arbitrary whether you use a principle- or application-consistent outline. No, it is not arbitrary. It is a feature of purpose. What is the purpose of this message? I may say, “In this message, what I really want is for people to change their behaviors.” In that case I may use a principle-consistent application: “Because this is true, you should do this, and this, and this.” Other times I may want people not to change their behaviors, but only to reinforce a behavior. Then I may use



an application-consistent outline: “Do this for this reason, for this reason, and for this reason. You already know to do this, but you are not doing it. You need to reexamine this reason, this reason, and this reason, so you will be doing what you already know to do.” For example, “You should pray more.” Well, I knew that before I came here. Why should I do it? Thus the message will be about reinforcing that application. Now, it may be that an application- or principle-consistent message could be preached on the same text, given what you know pastorally is the purpose to which you are directing this message.

It has also been asked if one type (application- or principle-consistent) lends itself better to web or flow. Probably not. Almost always, web will occur when there is some hard situation to be addressed. Then you will be looking for a text to address a certain situation. In those times I would probably be most often looking to reinforce already known concepts. For example, “You already know to believe and have faith in God in this position. Here is another reason and another reason...” That may be true, but I have not really thought that through. But web and flow usually relate to how we select texts rather than to how we form the message.

What if your proposition comes from a different text than the rest of the message you are preaching? Technically, that would be known as a textual message, and we will not do that this semester. An expository message will get its proposition and main points from the text. Textual preaching has a rich history in homiletics, but we will not do that this semester. We will do expository messages. I will say, what does this text say? We may go to other texts to support or corroborate, “Here is what it says here, and I can show you it is here, but just so you know it is true, I can point you to other texts as well.” But we will not say, “Here is something from 1 John. Now let us see how it is played out in the life of David.” We will not do that yet. That is technically called a textual message, where main points come from the text but developmental features come from somewhere else. We will say main points and subpoints come from this text. This semester we will do expository preaching only. We will talk about some of those definitions in the lessons to come.

Now, if the text you are dealing with is a repetition of a previous text, it provides context. We will say that context is part of the text. In order to understand this text, you need to know where that repetition was. It is necessary for interpretation of the text to identify its context. However, that is different from a textual message. You can have a series of messages on a topic, and an individual message can be preached expositively. However, that would be known as a topical message and is different from an expository message. A topical message takes its topic from the text, but its development comes from other texts. That technically is not an expository message. That does not mean it is not from the Bible or could not be developed scripturally. But an expository message solemnly binds itself to say, “I will tell you what this text means.” Now, I may have a subject in it, but I am not saying, “Here is the subject: prayer. Now let me tell you what five texts say on prayer.” We are saying, “This is what this text says.” You can preach the topic of prayer expositively, drawing it from Scripture. But an expository message according to its historical definition gets its main points and subpoints from this text. That is its definition.

Here are some cautions for propositions and main points. First, make sure propositions and main points are not coexistent. Coexistence occurs when the thought or wording of a main point is too much like the proposition or another main point. It is when the thought or wording of a main point is too much like the proposition or another main point. Here is an example: the proposition is “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must preach Christ at every opportunity.” The first main point is “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must preach Christ whenever there is an opportunity.” Those are different words, are they not? But what is the first main point conceptually like? It is just the proposition over again. Even though I have chosen different words, the concept has not changed. Now, what does the

hearer, who is not looking at an outline but just listening, wonder? “Was that a development or was that the same thing over again?” Or, let us say you use that main point as the third main point. “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must preach Christ whenever there is an opportunity.” What if that was the third main point? People would say, “Wait a second, we already talked about that. We have been there already.” Coexistence usually happens when you choose different words but the concept is too much like the first one. You have already been there. Do you know when you usually notice that you have done this? When you start doing the application and you have nothing different to say than what you said in that other main point.

As another example, “We should pray more” could be the application for the first main point. Then, “We should pray more frequently” might be the application of a coexistent main point. You may think, “What can I say now that would be different from what I just said?” The applications seem to be the same. Thus we want to make sure the concept as well as the wording differs between the main points. In other words, coexistence may be conceptual as well as terminological.

Another thing to do is to make sure the proposition does not inadvertently indicate a development or structure the main points do not reflect. If the magnet clause of one of my main points is “Jesus saves and keeps,” what do people automatically assume the subpoints will be? “Saves” and “Keeps.” What gave them the clue that those were the subpoints? The conjunction “and” in the wording of the magnet clause. If you use conjunctions, the ear hears that as divisions. Do you hear that? You meant to unite two concepts, but the ear hears it as a division. Thus if you say, “Jesus saves and keeps,” you have already signaled to people what your subpoints are. But what if you meant to say, “My first subpoint is ‘He hears and responds,’” well, the ear was not prepared for those words. What if your first subpoint was simply something like, “He saves and responds”? The ear is still not prepared for that, it is still confused. If you create what is called “branching,” which is what conjunctions create, you have orally told people where you are going. This can be very effective, can it not? You may even word the clause with a conjunction rather than saying, “Here is what we will be talking about.” But what you do not want to do is to create a development you do not follow, because then you only create confusion. If, for example, you work on a Philippians passage, you may want to say, “Because Jesus died and rose again, we should follow Him.” What will people automatically assume your subpoints will be? “Jesus died” and “Jesus rose again.” If you want to communicate that as one concept, what would you say? “Because Jesus rose...” That is the overarching concept, because in order to rise, Jesus must have died. If you have to choose, choose the overarching concept.

Now, what if you wanted to say, “My first subpoint is that Jesus died”? What if my first subpoint is “Jesus died” and my second is “He rose again.”? Then what would I want to do? I may very well want to put those branches into the wording so that those subpoints follow. But here is the idea: we want to avoid branching unless we use it. If you want to use it, then put it in, by all means. It can be very helpful. But avoid branching unless you use it.

Here are some helpful hints to know whether or not we are wording main points as we want. The first is the “imperative test”: do you have within that main point a “we should” or a “you should”? Is there an imperative clause? Is there a “we” or “you should...” (or a “we” or “you must...”) ? Is there an imperative clause? By the way, if you do not use the “we” or the “you,” you could use a verb in the imperative mode, right? For example, “Pray, because God listens.” What is the missing implied pronoun there? “You,” “You should pray.” So you can use an imperative mode verb. But the danger would be if you have two clauses and neither has an application. “Because God is sovereign, He raised Jesus from the dead.” What is missing? I have two clauses, but what is missing? There is no imperative. “Because God is sovereign, He raised Jesus from the dead.” There are two clauses, but there is no “you” or “we.”

These are technically known as statements of fact, but not exhortations. There is no exhortation. It is simply a statement of fact about something because it has no exhortation clause.

Second, there is the “stand-alone test.” Will the principle clause stand alone? If you were to only read the principle clause, would it make sense unto itself? You kind of chop it apart from the other clause and say, “Does that make sense or not?” Here is a non-example: “Because Jesus promises it, we should love Him.” If you were just to chop off the principle clause, which would it be? “Jesus promises it.” Does that make sense? What are all your questions? “Jesus promises it.” I have no idea what that means. So look at the principle clause and say, “If I were to make that stand on its own, does it make sense?” It is supposed to be a universal truth. Thus if I just look at it unto itself, will it stand alone? A better example is “Because Jesus promises His love, we should love Him.” In that case, “Jesus promises His love” makes sense unto itself.

Now, here is one key hint: do not use pronouns in both the magnet and anchor clauses. This is known as a double pronoun error. “Because Jesus loves us, we should proclaim Him.” To whom does the “we” refer? It refers to “us.” This is a pronoun referring to a pronoun. Who is the “us”? You could say, “Because Jesus loves His people,” “Because Jesus loves believers,” or “Because Jesus loves His children.” Make sure the pronoun refers to a noun, if you have a pronoun. You do not always have to have a noun in the first clause. But you do not want a pronoun referring to a pronoun. You need a noun or an implied noun.

There is also the “*non sequitur* test.” Make sure the application clause logically flows from the principle clause. The simple fact that you have two clauses does not mean they work together. “Because God comforts the grieving, we should tithe.” Now, there is both principle and application there. But they do not go together. Thus you want to make sure that they go together. The simple fact that you have both principle and application does not make it work. You want to make sure the thought flows: that is a *sequitur*, not a *non sequitur*.

## **Introductions**

Let us do some review. What components are wed in formal main points and propositions? Universal truth and application or exhortation, or you could say principle and application. Or the most basic answer would be what is true and what to do—principle and application. Again, the classic terminology is universal truth and exhortation. There is a combination of what is true and what to do about it, because that is what the sermon itself is ultimately about.

What two basic forms do we have for main point wording? We have conditional and consequential. If it is consequential, what is the key term that will appear? “Because.” If it is conditional, what is the key term? “Since” or “if.” How do anchor clauses and magnet clauses differ in main points? The anchor clause stays the same. The magnet clause changes. What specifically changes in it? The key terms change. This is the magnet clause, because the changing key terms draw attention. They draw all the attention of the exposition, because the key terms are what change. Everything else stays parallel, but the key terms change in the magnet clause.

What is a coexistent point, and why should it be avoided? What is a point when it is coexistent? It is too much the same. It is a main point that is too much like another main point or the proposition. They may be too much alike in wording, in terminology. What is another way they may be too much alike? The wording may be different, but what could still be the same? The concept could still be the same. It is not just a difference in wording that is important, but it should be different in concept. Classically this occurs when you simply word something in the negative, “We should keep praying... We should not cease to pray.” Well, even though the second point is worded in the negative, it is the same thing over again. One of the things we do to avoid that problem is we are not using “not’s” this semester when we word main points and propositions. What is the double pronoun error? That is where you have a pronoun whose antecedent is another pronoun.

To let you know what is happening, my friend the pastor who left the suicide note has been found. His body was found two days ago. Let me ask you, if I could, to join me in the Lord’s Prayer this morning. Would you repeat that with me, please?

*Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Thank you. For this lesson you see that we are talking about introductions to sermons. The goal for this lesson is to understand the basic purposes, marks, and construction elements of good sermon introductions. Here is one I would like to ask you to listen to, and then we will begin to think about its components.

The words were too close for comfort. Had Mickey Mantle not asked that these words be sung at his own funeral, we would have thought them too candid to be appropriate. This is what the legendary Mickey Mantle *asked* to be sung at his funeral:

“Yesterday when I was young,  
The taste of life was sweet as rain upon my tongue.  
I lived by night and shunned the naked light of day,

And only now I see how the years ran away.  
I used my magic age as if it were a wand,  
And I never saw the pain and the emptiness beyond.  
The game of life I played with arrogance and pride,  
And every flame I lit too quickly, quickly died.  
Yesterday when I was young,  
So many drinking songs were waiting to be sung.  
So many wayward pleasures lay in store for me,  
And so much pain my dazzled eyes refused to see.  
I ran so fast that time and youth at last ran out.  
And now the time has come to pay for yesterday, when I was young.”

So much swirled around Mickey Mantle that promised happiness, that promised satisfaction in this life: physical ability, fame, wealth, worldly pleasure, the bottle (alcohol), and formal religion. Each in its turn offered what it could. Each time Mickey Mantle grabbed for all the joy he could. And each time he came up empty. We understand, do we not? We understand how enticing the world’s promises of satisfaction are. But sometimes we forget how empty those promises are. The writer of Ecclesiastes responds and tells us in plain terms, “Because the promises of this world are empty, we must find our satisfaction in God alone.”

Now I want you to think of some of the things that are occurring in that actual sermon introduction from a sermon I preached a few years ago. Think of what is happening, what is occurring. There is an attempt to get people’s attention by speaking of particulars. Even the opening words are meant to stand alone, to arouse attention, “The words were too close for comfort.” Now, what we sometimes do in introductions is to begin to write English essays and say, “Sometimes life is complicated, and we think that...” We do some kind of big overarching thing. Sermon introductions do not do that. They invert the pyramid. We start with the particular. What is some particular thing you can say out of the account that would make it gripping from the beginning? “The words were too close for comfort. These are the words Mickey Mantle asked to be sung at his own funeral.” That is part of the beginning. In the introduction we also want to prepare, in concept and in terminology, for the proposition. Now, the proposition in the above example was “Because the promises of this world are empty...” Did you hear anything about promises of this world in the introduction? What was promising happiness to Mickey Mantle? Physical ability, wealth, fame, the bottle, pleasure... all these were promising, but Mickey Mantle came up empty. These are key words that are beginning to beacon already: promises of this world coming up empty because they are not providing satisfaction.

Thus the key words that will be in the proposition occur within the introduction itself. It does not just prepare conceptually. It prepares the ear—the ear is hearing key terms. Therefore when the proposition finally occurs, it sticks out. We know that is the point now, because we have heard those key words beaming. Thus when they finally come together, we know that is the point of the whole message. The introduction has gotten us ready.

One other piece is I did not just say, “There is an answer for this somewhere.” I said, “The writer of Ecclesiastes addresses this...” That is known as a Scripture bond. The introduction does all these things: it gets us ready in concept and terminology, it identifies a problem, it prepares us for the proposition, and it also bonds to Scripture. It tells me that the answer is someplace in the Scriptures.

Now that you have heard those things, let us begin to particularize and say how we will develop our own introductions. Here are the basic purposes of introductions. There are four. The first basic purpose of

introductions is to arouse attention: “This is important. You must listen to me. This has something to do with your life.” To arouse attention is the first goal. The second purpose is to introduce the subject. Not only do I try to get attention, but I also say, “This is what we will be talking about.” To introduce the subject is the second goal.

The third purpose, and the most important of the things I will say to you, is that it seeks to identify the fallen condition focus (FCF). The introduction seeks to identify the FCF. It does not just say what the subject is. It gives the reason why we are looking at the subject. This is where you take one of those key elements and say, “This is converting a lecture to a sermon.” I am not just saying, “I will talk today about the history of Israel.” I am not even just saying, “Today I will talk about the fall of Jericho.” I have to say why you must listen, what this has to do with you. So when you identify the FCF, you identify the burden of the sermon. What is wrong that requires this subject to be dealt with? What is wrong in whose life? The listener’s life. It is important that you recognize that. It is not just what is wrong in the life of the people in the Bible. Nor is it something that is simply wrong in the preacher’s life. When it is identifiable, it is not simply my identification. It is phrased in such a way to make it clear that we have identified what is wrong in the listeners’ lives so that they now must listen to what this sermon will be about.

The tendency, and sadly the great temptation of training to preach in an academic setting, is that we become great at giving sermons without reasons: “Here is simply information for you to know.” But what is so important is to let people know why it is important to listen. People may say, “You have to listen to this man. You have to listen to him. He lets you know from the very beginning, ‘Here is why you need to listen to this information. Here is what it will have to do with your life.’” You need to identify an FCF that is identifiable, one that we as listeners can identify with.

The fourth purpose of the sermon introduction is to prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology. It should prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology.

When you think of why all these are important, it is, I think, common sense. Why do we have importance attached to these opening words and opening moments? Because the opening words determine listener attention and speaker estimation. The opening words determine listener attention but also their estimation of the speaker, what they think of the speaker. This is typically determined in the opening moments.

Let me detail those a little bit. Let us begin with listener attention. There is an ancient phrase, going back to the time of the Romans, that says, “Well begun is half done.” “Well begun is half done.” If I lose you at the beginning, if you do not think this is important at the beginning, I will not get a second chance to make that first impression. The listener asks in those first few moments, “Are you speaking compassionately and credibly to me?” If you say that decision entails not only listener attention but also whether or not you are speaking compassionately and credibly, that is speaker estimation. The study of D. Cleverley Ford was done three decades ago in his book, *The Ministry of the Word*. He says, “The listener judgment of whether a speaker should be listened to was made in the first 60 seconds.” That was 30 years ago. Now, 30 years later, what would you say? You might say that happens in the first 30 or even 15 seconds. It is an amazing thought that people are estimating very early on, “Are you saying something that seems to communicate care for me?” and “Are you credible?” If those things are determined for the whole message within the first opening seconds, then it is very important what we say in those opening moments. This is, by the way, why we speak particulars rather than generalities at the beginning. If I just speak generalities, “The problem in the world today is sin,” people may think, “Well, that is not a new thought. Why did you bother to say that?” Rather, I could say, “It was 10

minutes past midnight, and she still was not home. And it was the third weekend in a row that she had broken curfew. It is hard to raise teenagers in today's culture." Now, if you were writing an English essay, what would you have put first? "It is hard to raise teenagers in today's culture." And then you would begin to do the particulars under that. In preaching we invert that. We put the particulars first in order to say, "This is important to you in particular. This has relevance immediately to life." And then I will develop the general principles out of that that will be addressed in the Word.

It has been asked when you are dealing with people you know very well, do these same rules apply? Is it still important to do particulars rather than universals? The answer is I think when people begin to know you and love you they forgive you much. If you ask, what is typically best, I would still say particulars should come first. Because we are all oral listeners with preferences for what that means as oral listeners, it is good to be aware of the differences between a written message and a heard message. Thus these principles will apply.

But I need to say clearly, not only about this but also about virtually everything I will say in this course, rules are meant to be broken. If you know what the rule is, then you may know reasons to break it. That becomes a strategy decision. What best enables me to communicate to these people I know? Thus sometimes I will do things that I might know in another context would not be wise or good. But because I know *these* people and I know the effect of doing this thing, I will actually seek to break this rule or standard that I am aware of. The danger comes when you do not know the rule at all. Then you are doing things you do not know the consequences of. There are times, for example, when I will say, "Start with particulars and then move to generalities." What if it is something you know is very, very sensitive in the congregation? Then my strategy may be, because I know all of that, I want to start with the generality and then move to a particular. This is because I know how sensitive this subject is. But now I know *why* I am doing what I am doing. What I am doing is not just haphazard; I know what the effects of these choices are, and so I will make appropriate choices. We will talk about delivery next time, and I will say, "I am going to talk about general rules for delivery. But you must know something: you cannot do anything wrong as long as you have a purpose for doing it." Does that make sense? You cannot do anything wrong as long as you have an adequate purpose for doing it. Thus these are things to know, to be guided by and sometimes to vary from, because you know what you are doing.

If the opening words are so important for listener attention and speaker estimation, there are some logical consequences. What do opening words require? First, they require careful preparation. They require careful preparation because they are so important. Second, they require a gripping presentation, since people make their estimation of you so quickly (Granted, if they know you they will not make such a quick estimation). Eye contact is very important. To bury your head in your notes and read introductions to people will usually cause them to think, "I will not listen to this person." It shows lack of care for your listener, not just lack of preparation for your message. Thus a gripping presentation usually means good eye contact and not reading word for word. Third, opening words require heart involvement. The introduction is the time to start reaching for hearts, to say, "I care about you." It is typically not the time to be argumentative. Now, there is a time for argumentation in a sermon, in a message. But the introduction is probably, most of the time, not the right time for argumentation. The standard wording of homileticians is "The introduction is the handshake of good intent." Does that sound good? This is the handshake; I am reaching out to you and saying, "Here, come with me. I have things to tell you." As in your introduction you try to say, "Here is good intention," you try to reach out and pull people in with the handshake of good intent. This typically means that in addition to careful preparation, gripping presentation, and heart involvement, there is also, fourth, a strong lead sentence. By that we often mean, if I were just to hear this opening line, would I be interested in this sermon? "The words were too close for comfort." "What will he talk about? What will that be about?" This is

better than something like “The world’s pleasures lead to dissatisfaction.” Both these sentences stand alone, but which would make you want to hear the message more? The generality or the particular?

The reason we are doing all this is for awareness of how sermons typically develop. The introduction often involves nearly the highest emotional intensity of a message. What do preachers usually try to have as the greatest emotional intensity of their message? The conclusion. This is because at the conclusion you are saying, “This is what is so important. This is why we gathered today. You must listen to me now on the basis of everything I have said,” and you give that final exhortation. That is the conclusion, and typically nothing has greater emotional intensity than the conclusion. But the second point of greatest emotional intensity usually the introduction.

Now, intensity is a strange word. It does not mean bombast, it does not mean loudness, and it does not mean great energy. But somewhere you are saying, “I care about this, and I want you to care about it too.” Thus we typically start out with some indication of compassion and credibility. It is that engagement of the heart, emotive intensity. Then typically after that we move into some technical things, “Here is my proposition...” We begin to lay out some context for the passage and that sort of thing. We typically, then, come down from the high emotional peak. But then we start to climb the mountain again so that when we are done we recognize that a sermon has an eventual movement. It starts high, then comes back down to begin to explain, but it moves up the mountain toward the greatest emotional intensity that comes at the conclusion. We are building the case (to use argumentative or debaters’ language), but more than that we are laying foundations on which transformation can be based.

Someone has asked, did the way I worded the Mickey Mantle introduction involve a strategy, and is that a standard thing that happens in preaching? The answer is yes. I worded that introduction in such a way as to raise questions in the listeners’ minds. That is a standard thing that happens in preaching. Now, that is only one strategy, but it is not the only strategy. This is a strategy to create questioning. Others create a sense of wonder, and others create a sense of controversy. But these are all varied strategies to say, “How do I make you have to listen to this biblical material?” And certainly one way is to create those questions, “Why is he talking about this? If that is not the answer, what is the other answer?” Part of this strategy is even to word things in a way that makes you say, “What? What does that mean?” Of course, this only works if you explain it later. Thus you create that interest, in one strategy, by raising questions.

If this is the importance of introductions, what are some standard types of sermon introductions? I have seven types to tell you about in this lesson, and you could multiply that by 10. There are so many variations of introductions. But here are some basic types, basic tools to put in your toolbox and be aware of. One basic type of sermon introduction is called “simple assertion.” This is the most basic type of sermon introduction. It should not be demeaned. This is where you simply say, “Here is what we will talk about today.” It is very clear and forthright. For example, “I want to talk to you today about how harbored anger can harden the softest heart.” This is very straightforward. It is simply, “Here is the subject.” This is “simple assertion.”

Some variation on that is “startling statement.” “‘Get out of here, and never come back.’ That is what Jesus said to the moneychangers when He drove them out of the temple. ‘You get out of here, and you never come back. You have no place in my Father’s house.’” Do you hear the startling statement? It makes you think, “Who would say such a thing?” “Faith without works...is alive and well and living in this church.” Would you listen to that sermon? If you did not drive him out of town first, would you listen to this sermon?



Another variation on that is “provocative question.” “Why would a loving God tolerate hell?” Would you listen to that sermon? Many people would. You ask a provocative question as the basis, getting the subject in view and also creating the thought, “I need to hear the answer to that. I recognize that problem. I need to hear the answer to that.”

Changing gears somewhat dramatically are “catalog introductions.” That is where we group similar items to form a single concept: “A hammock under a shade tree, a tall glass of iced tea, and Mozart on the breeze. Ahh, that is contentment.” You group some items to create a concept of “What would contentment be?” (At least, in worldly terms). If you are a fan of the *Sound of Music*, you could do the song, “Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens...” There you are grouping things to make people think, “This would bring happiness to your life.” This is the catalog approach. Here is another example that is a little heavier, “William Bennett, Kobe Bryant, William Jefferson Clinton, Martha Stewart, Enron executives, you, and me. Secure in the world, sinful before God, ready to be judged.” Do you hear the catalog? What groups all these people, you and me included? We may think ourselves secure in the world, but being sinful before God, we shall be judged.” By the way, when I am judged, I want Christ in my place. And that is the promise of the Gospel, that He will be in my place. But there will still be a judgment as all stand before the great throne. So we group items to make a point. That is a catalog approach.

Another form that is standard is “anecdote.” “A little boy went to his father and said, ‘Dad, what causes war?’ The father looked up from his newspaper and said, ‘Well, suppose the United States and Great Britain were to have an argument...’ And the mother said, ‘The United States and Great Britain would not have an argument.’ The father said, ‘I know. It was just an example.’ ‘Well, it was not a good example!’ ‘I know, I was just trying to make a point!’ ‘Well it was not a point you could make that way!’ ‘Never mind,’ said the boy. ‘Now I know what causes war.’” Anecdotes often are a way to get humor to make a point in a message.

For just a moment we need to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of using humor in a message. Here is the basic idea: humor serves you when you raise the hammer of emotional intensity in order to drive home a point. Now, you must hear that it is to drive a point. The humor must be obviously used to drive a point because of what happens to listeners if the humor does not do that. Not so long ago, if you were trained in law or almost any business school, you were trained to begin virtually every public address, any talk, with a joke. Start every talk with a joke. This is because of that rubric from rhetoric of long ago, “The introduction is the handshake of good intent,” was taught over and over and over again. Therefore people thought, “If I just say something funny, it will draw people in. They will like the joke, and they will feel good about me.” And it is true. If you were to look for the emotional reason people will listen to a message, they will say that by using humor you will get people’s attention. Humor really draws people in, and they listen. But—here is the important “but”—what they also began to recognize was that everyone was doing this. Thus all listeners knew what was going on. “You are telling a joke at the beginning to get my attention and to draw me in and to make me feel good about either you or the situation I am in. Therefore by telling the joke you are trying to manipulate me.” This happens so much in our culture that those who researched it would say that just as fast as attention is aroused, trust goes down, because no one wants to be manipulated.

Now, what is the way to bring attention and trust together to accomplish your point? You should recognize that humor does work when people do not feel manipulated. They do not feel manipulated if they can see what you told as a joke is tied to the subject. It has a purpose. It is when the humor appears not to have a purpose other than manipulation that I will strongly distrust you. When the humor is tied to the point, I can often say, “I now feel the subject in my heart with greater intensity because of the way

you used this. Now I actually appreciate the humor and recognize you did it with purpose for your subject, not merely to manipulate my feelings.” Now, if you throw away humor from your message, believe me, you will be a very sour preacher. Did Jesus ever use humor? There is no question that Jesus used humor. When He talked about “You are willing to judge your brother, and by that you will take the splinter out of his eye but ignore the log in your own eye” or when He said, “It is harder for a wealthy man to get to heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,” he was using humor. We may not be sure exactly how to exegete these passages, but there is no question that people laughed when He said it. He used humor, and His humor had a point. That is the issue: humor must have a purpose that is clear.

Now, is there ever a time when you are preaching a subject so heavy that humor lets people off the hook? Yes, and that could be negative or positive. It may be that you cannot deal personally with the intensity anymore and so just to lighten the mood you back off of it. By laughing, you back off of what you have said. “If you do not listen to my message, there will be great and horrible consequences for this church, ha ha ha.” What did I just do? I had trouble saying this. I had trouble in your hearing because I had to humor it to soften it somehow. But that may be very different than pastoral prudence that says, “This is so heavy for so long, if I do not lighten up a bit they will not be able to hear me. Therefore I need humor to do that.”

I was at a service recently of two churches that had a history that was sometimes not always positive. So the pastor who was dealing with this said, “It is great to be here with this church. We have been sister churches for a long time. And sometimes we have acted like sisters.” Everyone laughed, but it meant he could go on with great authority and power. He had named the elephant in the room as if to say, “I will not be intimidated by this. I can name it, you can laugh about it, so let us deal with it now and move on forward.” Thus that willingness I think can at times be a very powerful aspect of humor.

I am trying to warn you both ways. I am trying to say that humor has consequences if it does not have a purpose. And there will be consequences of just being afraid of humor and never being willing to show your own goodness of heart in the pulpit. Humor can have a purpose and strong power as long as it has a purpose. That is the thing to keep in your mind: if it is just an anecdote for humor’s sake, I would caution you strongly against it.

Here are a couple of other notes about humor, and then we will move on. Who is the only person you can make fun of from the pulpit? Yourself. Who is the only person you cannot pat on the back in the pulpit? Yourself. You and I have both sat in those churches where at times the pastor will say something like, “My wife and I have made a commitment that we will never go to sleep at night without having shared the Gospel to at least one person every day.” That makes you want to say, “Well, good for you.” It makes you want to slap him. You do not want to commend yourself from the pulpit. Now, this can sometimes be a difficulty, because you want to say something positive, and you did something positive. If you did something positive, though, who gets the credit? God must get the credit. The Lord enabled you. Thus you do not have to never say you did anything good, but you must always give the credit to the Lord if you did. And if you say something positive about yourself, you should typically say, “Now, I recognize this was not of me.” And maybe you would even say, “And my high view of myself is not of God.” Somehow you have to combat self complementation.

The other note about humor is how easy it is use humor that is damaging to people and not even know it. Some humor is so prevalent in culture, so out there. I remember I did this one time. I used an illustration about a sheriff who was getting older and needed to qualify for his annual pistol target test to be able to keep using his pistol. So he went to take his test. But he had just gotten a new pair of trifocals. For those

of you who shoot, you know this will be a real problem. When you shoot you have to get the target in focus, you have to get the front sights of the gun in focus, and you have to get the back sights of the gun in focus—all at the same time. And this man has new trifocals! So he tried to get the right angle, but finally he said, “I have been doing this for 30 years!” He just let his instincts take over, saying, “I know where that thing is.” He shot where his instincts told him it had to be. The sermon I was preaching was about Christians developing instincts about what is sinful. At times they will not be able to identify the specific verse that pulls the sin into focus, but when they have so long lived for the Lord, their instincts tell them something is off base. Now, I thought that was a pretty good illustration. And then I shook people’s hands at the door of the sanctuary later. And one of my favorite people in the world, my senior elder, came up to me and shook my hand, and then held it and said, “Bryan, I never thought I would hear you make fun of older people.” What did I do? I did not mean to, but I took advantage of other people’s age in life in order to be funny. And it was not appreciated.

Who is the only person you can make fun of in the pulpit? Yourself. Who are people we typically make fun of in the pulpit? If evangelical suburban middle-class culture accepts it, who do we make fun of in the pulpit with impunity? We make fun of our own families. “My wife the other day, you should have seen...” What does everyone do when you mention your wife? They look right at her. How is she responding? How is she reacting? And how dare you make fun of your own spouse in front of everyone? So if you tell something from the pulpit that puts your spouse in a bad or even a compromising light, what must you do? Even as you are telling the story, you must tell the congregation that you have asked permission. You must say that. You must say, “I have talked to my wife about this, and she said I could say this.” Do not assume they know. You are trying to communicate compassion, and if you would be willing to bring even your spouse into embarrassment, who will go to you for counseling? They will laugh at the joke, but they will not trust you.

Who else do we make fun of in our churches? We make fun of children and politicians—particularly of whatever party the majority of your church does not align with. One time I had the awful experience of being confronted by an older woman in my church. We were going down a hallway, and she simply stopped me and grabbed me by the elbows. She said, “Bryan, when did our people determine to get so mean? We tell so many jokes about the president in this church, I cannot bring my own unsaved children here because they are not of the political party that is most appreciated in this church.” Think about that. We just tell the joke, everybody laughs, and we all agree this is somebody to make fun of. And as a result, unbelievers, people who do not agree with us politically, and certainly people who are not already part of the clan, see no reason to sit here. They are thinking, “You just make fun of people who disagree with you.”

Who else do we make fun of? Other denominations and other churches. Again, this is so easy to do. And because we do it so commonly, we do not hear the offense of it to people who are, again, not already part of the clan. But think of this, because of my position I speak in mainly Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) churches. I go to churches that are quite large and some that are very historic in the PCA. Often that means I teach a joint Sunday school class. All the adults get together, and sometimes the kids, and I always ask the question, “How many of you were raised in a Bible-believing Presbyterian church?” Even in the most historic of the churches I go to, if more than 15% raise their hands, it is an exception. It is almost always 15% of the people or fewer. Now, if you tell jokes about other denominations, what do you know you are doing? You are making fun of people, their families, and their backgrounds. They will laugh, but they will not like you, and they will not trust you.

Often racial and ethnic humor comes out in ways we do not intend. Just using a dialect other than my own can be offensive. Describing someone by his or her race who is doing a bad thing can be offensive,

“And this great big old Indian came into the store...” What does the fact that he is Native American have to do with the account? Or does he sound worse because you identified his race? You may not even recognize when you do that. But identifying the race of the subject is stereotyping in ways you may never have intended. Who is the only person you can make fun of from the pulpit? Yourself. And you sometimes have to listen very carefully to recognize what you yourself are doing because of how commonly humor is used to demean others to elevate us.

Having moved beyond that, let us continue to look at other ways in which we sometimes use sermon introductions. We just finished talking about anecdotes. Another type is news or historical accounts told in contemporary terms. When we talk about illustrations, we will come back to this. We will talk about how even if we are using historical accounts we do not leave it to 1000 years ago. We will ask, how do we tell those accounts in contemporary terms?

But, above all things I have mentioned to you thus far, the most important and commonly used type of introduction is human interest accounts. A human interest account is a story of an ordinary or extraordinary person in an ordinary or extraordinary situation experiencing thoughts and emotions with which ordinary people can identify. Is Mickey Mantel an ordinary or extraordinary person? He is extraordinary. Is his life extraordinary or ordinary? It is extraordinary. But is a person who pursued the world’s happiness all his life and came up empty extraordinary? It is very ordinary, and everybody can identify with that. Our story can be about an ordinary or extraordinary person in an ordinary or extraordinary situation but with thoughts or emotions an ordinary person can identify with. Princess Diana was an example of someone by whom a whole nation was gripped. She is a princess with a Cinderella story, and so you would say, “Nobody could relate to that.” Her marriage went bad, she lived under the press, in the eye of the world and so forth. But what do we recognize? No matter what came her way, she was very unhappy. Life never gave her anything that made her happy enough. And it was, in a sense, that unhappiness with which so many people could identify. That was what made people long to hear so much about her. A human interest account is the type of story that will over and over again pull people in and make them have to listen.

What are marks of poor sermon introductions? As you begin to get a feel of the importance of the introduction and know what goes into them, what marks poor sermon introductions? The first two marks that I will mention to you are the most important. They are historical recap and logical literary recap.

Let us look at historical recap first. The preacher begins by saying, “Now at this time of the life of Israel, they are 40 years out of the land of Egypt, and they are about to enter the Promised Land. They have been in the desert of sin, they wandered through the Negeb, and they have gone around the Moabite territory. But now they are getting ready to go into the Promised Land, where they will face a number of different people. There will be the Hittites and the Jebusites, among others. And some of these will be more...” What are most people now doing? You just heard the channels switch or else the switch turn off. They sat down, many of them thinking, “I know the Bible was written 2000 to 4000 years ago, but I am sitting here because he is going to say something that applies to my life.” And in the first 20 seconds, you convinced them they are wrong. You will only say things that apply to thousands of years ago. Now, is all of that information about history important to say in the sermon? Yes, it has its place. The introduction, however, is not that place. It is very important information, because contextualization is very important, but this is not the place for it.

Very similar to historical recap is logical literary recap. “Now, here we are in the fifth chapter of Romans. You may remember that over the last three weeks, what we have been covering is how this chapter has had its development up until this point. In the first chapter of Romans, of course, we saw the

consequences of the Fall and how that affects all people. And in the second chapter we recognize that the Fall came through the life of Adam, who was affected through original sin but also had consequences in his own life, so the redemption would be necessary. In the third chapter we recognize that redemption is necessarily applied to all people because all have sinned..." What are people doing now? Again, you just heard the switches go off. Is it important to give that logical literary recap? Yes, we will be doing that. But it is not the place to begin. Often what happens (we will cover this next time) is that people confuse the sermon introduction with what we will call the Scripture introduction. The Scripture reading itself has an introduction, which may have some brief contextualization, so the people know what they are reading. But that is different than the sermon introduction that has this high obligation of arousing interest and communicating compassion.

It is the sermon introduction that we are dealing with in this lesson. We will deal with the Scripture introduction another time. Typically, great errors occur in terms of arousal of interest. These are not errors of doctrine but of communication. Those errors occur when people start with historical recap or logical literary recap. Now, here are some quick additions to marks of poor sermon introductions, and you will commonsensically recognize them all.

A third mark of a poor sermon introduction is a porch on a porch. You start with a story that leads to what? Another story. You know the first one really did not hit the mark that you were trying to get to, but it did lead you to an idea that led you to the next idea to get to what you wanted to get to. So, how many introductions are there to a sermon? There is just one introduction.

Another mark is broad or simplistic assertions. Sermons should not begin with broad or simplistic assertions such as "We should sin less." You might as well not have said it. It is too broad. It is not going to be gripping, in fact they may think, "Oh, there he goes again."

The fourth mark of a poor sermon is a highly passionate or argumentative beginning. I am going to tease a little bit here, but think of what you would feel if I started a sermon by saying, "Today I am going to tell you the most important thing in the world! You must listen to me!" Now, if I start that way, what will everybody think? "Get out of my face, what are you doing?" It is too much, too fast, too early. Are there places to be highly impassioned? Of course, but it is typically not right off the bat.

The fifth mark is more difficult for us because it involves so much pastoral prudence. It is using inappropriate cultural references. Very soon you will discover the importance of arousing attention. That will create a whole host of temptations for you, because you will recognize that there are easy ways to do it that are inappropriate pastorally. One is to say things that are on the edge of acceptability. For instance, I could begin to quote or name scenes of a recent and controversial movie that may have violent graphic content, sexually graphic content, or a lot of profanity in it. Now, it may be very applicable to what I am saying. I may even kind of like the fact that it may set people's teeth on edge, because they are saying, "Oh, so he has seen that, huh?" That is one possibility. It may be movies, it may be music, or it may be books. We are a pop culture dominated generation. There are aspects of generation, region, maturity, and so forth that need to be taken into account when you think of what is appropriate for you to speak about from the pulpit. For instance, take profanity. Do the people in the pew not know profanity? They all know it, but they are not expecting to hear it from their pastor. They are not expecting their children to be schooled in it from the pastor in the pulpit. Now, this may be appropriate in private meetings. I have certainly been in situations where single moms have asked me as a pastor, "Will you please come and talk to my son? He is in third grade, he is hearing all these words, and he is repeating them. He does not listen to me. Will you, as a man, come in and talk to my son?" Of course I do talk to them and deal with some of those issues. But that is different from other things. Our

culture is changing rapidly. Recognize that until the 1960s (many older people in your church would be from this generation), the word “pregnant” could not be used on television. I remember the very first time I used the word “homosexual” in the pulpit. My wife was frightened, because she thought I would lose my job simply because I had used the word. That was only about 20 years ago that I did that. Things are moving very quickly in our culture. These are things we will talk much more about when we deal with illustrations. But I just want you to be aware of the powerful temptation of thinking, “Well, I really want them to listen to me, so I will rouse their attention by saying this thing,” and you know that thing is on the edge.

It is your obligation to exegete two things. You have to exegete the text and the people. Now, we can say exactly what movies you can cite and which you cannot, right? No, we are back to that pastoral prudence. God called you to the situation. He gave you judgment, understanding of people and understanding of His Word. With what He has given you, what are you able to say to communicate God’s Word? We can talk about struggles with anger, we can talk about struggles even with addictive problems that we have had. But what is the one thing that our congregations will typically struggle to hear from us as a category of sin? Sexual sin. Other cultures are not this way, some are more this way, but American culture very much struggles to hear from the pulpit the pastor’s own struggle with past sexual sin. The reason is because we know that recidivation is so very high. If you have struggled in the past, they know you probably struggle in the present. And so for a pastor to deal with that particular subject even from the past will be a great difficulty. You would have to say so many qualifications that you may not have time to say them all in a sermon. Thus I will typically say, if you feel like you must talk about past sexual struggle, then the place is probably a men’s retreat with a few people around rather than from the pulpit with everybody around, because then the kid goes home at lunch and says, “Mommy, what did the pastor mean when he said...” Is that the right place?

This is (I love this terminology, though it is not my own) redemptive transparency. If I never indicate as a pastor my struggles, then people say, “You do not know what is going on in my life. I cannot listen to what you say because I cannot identify with you.” On the other hand, if the way I am being transparent actually undermines my ability to share the Gospel, then that is no longer redemptive transparency. That is selfish transparency. Now, what is the line? What phrase am I going to use again? Pastoral prudence. The Holy Spirit is very important in the life of a pastor, is it not? The Holy Spirit teaching us, convincing us, helping us think the thoughts of God. Thus pastoral prudence is a major part of our judgment as we move through life and say, “What is appropriate for this people at this time and this place?”

It has been asked, is it dishonest in a human interest account to use people you know but to change names of people and places? We will talk more about this later, but I will say this now. It can be done honestly, but it depends on the words you use. If I say of someone, “There was a man who came to my office a couple of years ago, I will call his name Bill...” What did I just say to people? His name is not Bill. By using that phrase I indicated, “To protect this man, I am changing his name.” Thus I am telling a true account. But by using that phrase, “I will call his name Bill,” I am saying, “That is not his real name, but I am protecting him by not giving his real name.” Now integrity is in place, compassion is in place, everything is in place just by using a phrase like that, and we will learn more of those. Sometimes you can put yourself in the third person: “I know a man who...” But it may be that you recognize that if you would tell this about yourself, you would seem to be self-aggrandizing. Then it might be better to say, “I know someone who did...” and never mention your own name. This is a way to keep from praising yourself and yet still telling a true account.

Back to the marks of a poor sermon introduction, another that I missed is using Scriptures other than the one you will be preaching from. Do not use Scriptures other than the one you will be preaching from in your introduction. Think pragmatically for a second. The people just opened their Bibles to Philippians 2. And then in the sermon introduction you say something like, “And in 1 Thessalonians 4 it says...” Now what will everyone say? “Oh, I thought we were in Philippians. I am in the wrong place.” Thus by citing references in the introduction other than the one you will be preaching about, you confuse people. Will we cite other Scripture references in the sermon? Of course. But not in the introduction; it just confuses people.

How do you make others have to listen to these introductions? Remember the old line, “There are those you can listen to, and there are those you cannot listen to, and there are those you must listen to.”? How do you become one of those who must be listened to in your introduction? First by recognizing it is important to arouse attention. You already know that, but I will still say it. You can just talk about “little tales for little minds” and make fun of this need, but do you not want people to create some interest in you when you hear a sermon? Thus arousing attention is the first thing. But the second and even more important is include an identifiable FCF. Why do I have to listen to you? Have you identified a burden in my life that makes me recognize that the Word of God will deal with me today in this message you are preaching? It is also important to personalize the FCF. When I say personalize, I do not mean that you should personalize it for you as the speaker. I mean you should personalize it for the listener. “I know what is going on in your life, and I will tell this to you today in such a way that you will recognize that this engages your life. I have identified a burden that you have and that is clear in the message.

What are the marks of good sermon introductions? They have an effective start. I encourage you very much to think about that “stand-alone standard.” Would the opening sentence capture any interest if it stood alone? If you just heard that opening sentence, would it be an effective start? Second, they are of an efficient length. Introductions are not too long. If it is typed out on a standard page to two-thirds of a page, then you are right at the max. You are getting very long if it is two-thirds of a page. Most times it should be about half a page in length. This means two minutes is a very long introduction. The typical length is 90 seconds. Next, it bonds to Scripture. Somehow it tentatively points out that this text will address this concern. The fourth mark is it flows into the proposition. The introduction flows into the proposition in two ways: concept and terminology. The concepts you talk about in the introduction are what the sermon will be about, and the proposition is about that concept. And the key terms, the terminology, is introduced in the introduction. The proposition is actually a summary of the key ideas in the introduction. These springboard it into the sermon. The introduction prepares for the proposition in concept and terminology. This next sentence is very important: there should be no key terms in *either clause* of the proposition that have not been mentioned in *precisely* the same terms in the introduction. Remember, I used the word “satisfaction” in the Mickey Mantle story, right? Then the proposition had the word “satisfaction.” I did not switch them and talk about satisfaction one place and fulfillment in the next place. Precisely the same terms echoed, because I was getting the ear ready for what the proposition would be.

Here is what we are hoping to accomplish in our introduction. We are creating a chain. We recognize that the introduction has the obligation to arouse attention, introduce the subject, create an identifiable FCF (and make the FCF personal for *the listener*), bond to Scripture (somehow Scripture will deal with this issue), and prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology. Here is an example.

As my mother listened to Mary’s brazen confusion, her worst fears and suspicions were sadly confirmed. Mary had just declared that she was leaving her husband and pursuing a relationship with another man. For a long time my mother had been noticing her long-time friend Mary

making frequent trips to visit the owner of a store across the street from her own business. Rumors were flying in the small town where they lived, and my mother had finally decided to find out what was going on. My mother's tentative questions were met with surprising candor by Mary. "It is all right," she said. "God has led me to this new relationship. And besides, I will be much happier with him." My mother left their conversation dumbfounded. She was afraid for Mary. She knew that if Mary continued on her present course God would judge her for her sin. She knew that Mary needed to hear both the words of rebuke of God's Word and the hope of grace in Jesus Christ from God's Word. She wondered, "How can I warn Mary that God judges sin and yet provide her with the eternal hope of biblical truth?" How would you respond in such a situation? [Here is one of those questions, right?] My mother's account reminds us that opportunities to proclaim the truths of God's Word can arise at any time, often in unexpected situations. In His providence, God continually places us in situation after situation where we can provide hope by carefully and faithfully applying the Word of God. [FCF is about to come.] But most of us struggle to speak up with clarity and conviction when God calls us to proclaim His truth, despite our knowledge that God will judge. What will motivate us to overcome our hesitation and fears and enable us to speak the truth of God's Word in many different circumstances that we face? The apostle Paul's charge in 2 Timothy 4 answers these very questions [do you hear the Scripture bond?]. Paul writes that "Because God will judge sin [have you heard the language of God judging sin before in this introduction?], we must proclaim His Word [have you heard that language before?], yes, in every situation [have you heard about "every situation" in this introduction?].

The key words of both clauses in the proposition occurred in the introduction.



## Exposition

Two major purposes of introductions are to arouse attention and to introduce the subject. Certainly the historic purpose and the purpose most often given is that they are to arouse attention. Introductions arouse attention and introduce the subject. Those are the historic two. The other two purposes are to make the fallen condition focus (FCF) personal and to prepare for the proposition in two ways, in concept and terminology. So the four purposes of introductions are to arouse attention, introduce the subject, make personal the FCF, and then prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology. What are some major types of introductions? We listed several, so there are lots of answers that you could give here. The human interest account is the most important and most frequent. Some other types of introductions would be catalog, provocative question, simple assertion, and startling statement. The key one is human interest account.

Two commonly used but ineffective types of introductions are historical recap and literary recap. Those two are common but fairly ineffective. We will talk about how those sometimes work their way into a Scripture introduction, which is different from a sermon introduction, so we will talk about those a little bit, but not for the sermon. How should the introduction prepare for the proposition? We already said this, did we not? The introduction should prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology. Let us pray, and then we will begin.

*Heavenly Father, we praise You for Your Word, not only for the truth of it, but also for the sufficiency of it. All that we need for life and godliness, You have given to us in the Word that is completing us. We ask, Father, recognizing that we come to You at different stages of life, with different weaknesses and temptations, different senses of being empty or insufficient, and therefore we thank You that You give us the Word, that because it speaks of You, it is making You our portion. We would pray again this day for that knowledge of You that gives us strength and joy that is strength because we have learned more of our Savior from what we say and what Your Word says. Teach us, we pray, to be these vessels of Your goodness so that poured out from us would be the words of life for others that are their portion, whatever state of life they are in. Grant us, we pray, even the ability this day in what we are doing to be prepared for Your work. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Our goal for today is to understand the basic nature and characteristics of sound biblical exposition, so today we will talk a lot more about just what exposition is. Your instincts already tells you a great deal, but I want to talk about why it is important to think about the specifics of what is involved in exposition.

I think you realize that, for a vast number of people in our culture—and we will look at some of the statistics in a little bit—the Bible, while it is the “good book,” is nonetheless this impenetrable maze of unfamiliar names, difficult concepts, and ancient codes. Many people believe that you have to have the right knowledge to delve into its mysteries, and because of that, people just kind of stand away. Their attitude is “I cannot deal with that. I cannot get into that. It is too difficult.” In my mind, the goal of good preaching, what exposition is about, is convincing people that the mystery of the Word is a myth. Good preachers convince people that the way in which they can find the meaning of the Word is simply along a very well worn path that anyone can follow as long as they understand how to interpret with some very basic rules. The goal of the very best preaching is to convince people that they can do it rather than that the preacher is the only one who can do it. It is, in a sense, giving away the mystique of the preacher. Good preachers say, “I am going to let you see that you can do this.” The very best preaching says, “The mystery that you think surrounds this book is a myth. You can understand it, too.”

Now how do we go about doing that? Let us review the big picture of where we have been in the course thus far. We started out talking about the context of the sermon, and we talked about what the Word itself is. We discussed its inherent power. We talked somewhat about the nature not just of the message but of the messenger—the importance of our *ethos*, our character, and our own communion with God in terms of being able to express the truth of God’s Word. Then we said that if we are going to preach from God’s Word, we have to select the text. We talked about some basic principles for selecting and interpreting the text, and we even discussed some tools for interpreting the text. All of this was getting ready for the sermon itself, but now we have begun to get a little more intensely into the message itself. We have talked about the introduction that leads to a proposition. We put a head, as it were, on the sermon, and we know that it has a throat—that is the proposition. We began to develop main points. These are, as it were, the bones, the skeleton, of the message. The message has a head and a throat and a skeleton. Today we will begin to put flesh on these bones by talking about what exposition is. We will start by talking about the nature of exposition. Then, in the coming lessons, we will begin to go into the specifics. We will answer the questions, “What are these subpoints like? What are illustrations like? What are applications like?” We will even talk about the nature of explanation and its various features and components. So the big picture is that we have a skeleton, and now we have to start putting flesh on the bones and thinking what it means for the sermon to take physical form in front of us.

I have described exposition as shedding some ordinary light on the path that leads to the truth of God’s Word. Here is a formal definition of exposition: exposition is presenting the meaning of a scriptural text so that it may be understood—and you know the key here is the conjunction “and”—*and* acted upon. One of the contributions of the last decade’s study of even the Greek meaning of the word “doctrine” is that more and more we understand that for the Greeks, “doctrine” did not just mean abstract thought. It meant thought that could be lived. It is the practice of the principles. Exposition is more than just saying, “Here is what this passage means abstractly.” Exposition is understanding it so that it can be acted on. Exposition is all of those things.

Just because I am a homiletics professor, I will do the standard thing that homileticians do, which is just remind you that the noun is “exposition,” the adjective is “expository,” and the verb is “expound.” We do not “exposit” texts. We expound them. Okay, I did my homiletics duty, and now you can say “exposit.” Homiletics teachers, historically, do not recognize the verb “exposit.” It is “expound.” We expound the text. Now what does that mean?

For some biblical foundations of what exposition involves, there are key texts that we turn to like Luke 24:27. This passage describes Jesus after the resurrection, walking on the road to Emmaeus with the two disciples, and the Bible says, “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he expounded”—now the Greek word there is *diermeneuo*. *Diermeneuo* means “to unfold the meaning of what is said, that is, to interpret.” I like the image of unfolding. So Jesus unfolded “unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Now you must know that “all the Scriptures” does not mention Jesus by name, but He is unfolding the meaning of the Scriptures. He is saying, “Here is where it stands in relation to me. Here all the Scriptures are culminating in me; here is how they all tell you what I am and what I do.” He is explaining the meaning of the Scriptures beyond what might seem obvious at first. Here is what it means, and of course what it means is Him. Again, it is His story. Now in that same passage, after Jesus has left, they ask each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” That term “opened” is another interesting term. Here it is *dianoigo*. He opened the Scriptures to us. The meaning is “to open all the way,” as to open a door wide open, so that someone can go into it. Now again, I just like the richness of the language, do you not also? It is not only unfolding, like the unfolding of a scroll, but it is also the notion of opening the door all the way so that someone can go in there and see what is involved in that text and its meaning. These become two

very key terms for us in understanding exposition—to unfold the meaning and to open up the text so that people can go in and see what is there.

There are key examples of biblical expositions. We think through the pattern of the Scriptures. How do they teach us what preaching is? What do the Scriptures show us about this unfolding and opening up of the Word of God? The key Old Testament example is from Nehemiah. Remember that at this point the children of Israel have been in exile for 70 years. They do not remember the law of God. They do not even remember the language of the law of God, so to make known to them what must happen there are certain steps that the leaders take, and Nehemiah explains them in Nehemiah 8. He describes Ezra's actions. "Ezra opened the book"—now we get that "opening" language again—"Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them, and as he opened it, all the people stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen, amen.' Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. The Levites..."—and then they are named—"...instructed the people in the law while the people were standing there." This term, "instruction," is another key term. What does that instruction involve? We are told right here. "They read from the book of the law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning, so the people could understand what was being read." Now do you see those components beginning to unfold? They read the book, and then they made clear what it said. They began to give the meaning so the people could understand. We will now look also at the Hebrew to understand more specifically how that instruction from the Word is broken down and what its pieces are.

The presentation of the Word is the first component. First, we present the Word of God to people, reading it and making it clear. The Hebrew there is *parash*, which means "to distinguish or to specify clearly," probably in this context meaning to translate. Now that is interesting, is it not? They did not just read the Word. They said, "You have to understand what these words mean." So at a bare level, it was giving definitions of the words. You have to know what these words mean. There is translation occurring, but there is more than that. Not only did they present what the word said, but they also said what it means. There is an explanation component as well as a presentation component. When it says that they gave the meaning, the Hebrew there is *sekel*, which means "to give the sense of meaning requiring perception or insight." This is not mere definition, but the idea is that you have to know implications of this word. You have to have insight into what its implications may be, and that becomes clearest in the final component, as they caused the people to understand. That is, they gave exhortation as well. If you have studied Hebrew, How did you memorize the word *ben*, "to understand"? The way I did it is that I just thought about how in my father's shop, there are various bins for nails and screws and brackets. He puts different things in different bins, so that he can find them and use them when he needs them. He has them categorized according to use. That is actually what the Hebrew word, *ben*, "to understand," means. It means "to categorize for use"—to understand something so that I can use it.

Do you see how all three components of exposition come together in this account? We see from this earliest description of a preaching moment that exposition involves presentation, explanation, and exhortation from the Word. I show you what it says, I explain what it says, and then I exhort you to act on that, to put it to use. Those three components of Old Testament practice worked their way into what the theologians call synagogue worship. These things continued to occur in the synagogue, and we even see them in New Testament practice as well.

You will remember that Jesus, when He went to the synagogue and read from the Scripture, gave the import and then applied it. Listen to this from Luke 4: "Jesus read the Scripture"—by the way, when he read from the Scripture, what was His body posture? He stood. When He explained it, what did He do? He sat down. Well, that might be interesting for today, if every time you preached you sat down, but

there was certainly an element of respect for the Word in that practice. Is that not interesting? He stood to read the Word, and then the practice was to sit down while explaining the Word. That was an expression of authority at least for the scribes, but Jesus followed that in the synagogue practice. So Jesus stood to read the Scripture. What is happening there? Again, He is presenting the Word. The first step is to say, “Here is simply what the Word says.” Then He gave the import of the Scripture. He explained it as well. In that step, He says, “What does it mean? Now that you know what it says, what does it mean?” Then Jesus applied the Scriptures. We know He applied them because the people were ready to stone Him afterward, because He said that the Scriptures that they have read apply to Him, which means they should honor Him. They understood exactly the exhortation in His words, so there was exhortation as well.

We find these three elements of exposition in Pauline practice as well. I am not going to read through all of the possible examples, but just for the moment consider 2 Timothy 4:2. Here the word for preaching is *kerusso*, the proclamation and the singing out of the Word of God. In this passage, Paul says that we are to preach the Word in season and out of season. In saying, “preach the Word,” we understand that notion of simply presenting what the Word says, but then he also says, “correct, rebuke, and encourage.” Do you hear the applications? Correct people from the Word, rebuke people from the Word—by the way, also encourage them from the Word. And then we read, “...with great patience and careful instruction.” Note that the order changed here but not the elements. We still have presentation, exhortation, and explanation. What you have in addition is a meshing of authority as well as encouragement. Do you remember early on in the course when I asked you, “When you think of preaching, what voice do you hear in your head?” It is interesting that when we see Paul describing preaching, he has many voices contributing. You are to correct people. That is one kind of voice. You are to rebuke people on the authority of the Word. That is another kind of voice. But what is the last one? You are to encourage. If we hear only one voice, we will probably be too limited in our preaching.

I must tell you it was very hard for me to know what voice to speak in recently. I went and spoke at a funeral of a pastor who had taken his own life, and I will tell you that in my mind, there was a need to do each one of those things. There was a need to correct, to say, “Here are some ways that people are handling this that are probably wrong, and we need to correct it.” It is very hard to talk about a voice of rebuke at such a funeral, but there was a need to say that what this man, my very good friend, did, was wrong, and there are terrible consequences not only for his family but for his church. I needed to say that this was wrong, and at the same time to say, “but as evil as it was, God is that good and more so.” We must recognize that there is an appropriate voice in which to deliver each message. As we explain the Word, we want to make sure it is not our person that is controlling the Word but the Word that is controlling our person. That is part of the explanation, is it not? Part of the explanation is that what we are saying matches how we are saying it. We explain in all of these ways what God requires so that we are faithful to this exposition, this unfolding of God’s Word.

Even the Great Commission contains this pattern. Once you see it, you will see it over and over again in the Scriptures. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Is there a teaching component? Well, you surely see that there is explanation. We are to teach others to observe. What are they to observe? What Jesus has commanded. So the word that Jesus has given is what we are to be teaching. Again, there is presentation and explanation of the Word, and then is there exhortation or application of it. They are to observe. They are to do what Jesus has commanded. So even though we recognize that these components can change in order, they all keep appearing, and so we have our basic definition of exposition here. Exposition, therefore, unites the presentation of the Word with explanation (that is, information about the Word) and

exhortation, or application of the Word. I think when we approach preaching early on, we tend to equate exposition with explanation, but exposition is more than that. It is the presentation of the Word, the explanation of it, and exhortation based on that explanation.

Now how do we make sure that we accomplish all of these things in a sermon? Some of that, I think, is probably common sense to you, but you have to say, “Well, how do these things actually begin to take shape in the sermon that we are putting together?” What we will do now is talk about the three components that, historically, in formal, classical messages, go in every main point. In every main point, this meat between is composed of three components: explanation, illustration, and application. So in every one of these major categories between the main points we will find three components: explanation, illustration, and application.

Obviously, explanation answers the question, “What does this text mean?” Of course, we will cover how to do explanation a whole lot more in the course, but let us now talk about the standard tools. There are four of them. When you say, “What does explanation involve?” there are four standard tools. The first is repetition. How do we explain what a text means? The first tool is repetition. For example, “Jesus said we should always pray and not faint. What does that mean? It means you should always pray and not faint.” Repetition is the first tool. The second tool is very similar. It is restatement. It is saying the concept again but in different words. For example, “Jesus said we should pray and not faint. Now what that means is that we should pray and not give up.” Do you hear the restatement? The third tool is definition and/or description. Now, typically definition is much more important to us in didactic passages like in the epistles. For example, “What does the word ‘propitiation’ mean? How does it differ from ‘expiation’?” We might explain those two words as a substitute for wrath versus the turning away of wrath, but I may have to explain to many people what those words mean. Didactic passages will often surface words that we have to explain. By contrast, narrative passages, the stories (and by that I do not mean something fictional, but the historical or biographical accounts in Scripture) often involve description. I have to say, “What happened here? Why did it happen? Why is it important to know, in this explanation of the Lord’s Supper, that this is the third cup of the Passover that Jesus is dispensing?” I will describe what that means. So in didactic passages we are often giving definitions, while in narrative passages we are often giving descriptions. In both cases, what we are doing is basically this: we are making the unknown known. That is what definition or description tries to do: to make the unknown known. Now I think you will recognize that the fourth basic tool for explanation is argument. After repetition, restatement, and definition comes argument. This does not mean that we will sound argumentative, but we will present the supporting proofs for the truth we have stated. So we bring to bear logic, exegesis, and context. We bring the supporting proofs for the truth we have stated. In essence, we establish the point logically. Now these four things, in the history of preaching, are known as “the general processes.” They are very standard. If you said to people in many different schools, “What are the general processes?” they would recognize these four aspects of explanation—repetition, restatement, definition or description, and argument. These are the general ways that we explain what a text means.

Which are the most frequently used? The first two. Why did you go to seminary? The last two. Now it is important that we say that to one another honestly, because our tendency is to load up a sermon with definition, description, and argument, when repetition or restatement would have done the job. That is very tempting because we think, “I went to seminary! I got all that information!” Do you remember the statement from John Stott: “The great torch of every preacher is putting away 90% of what you know about a passage in order to explain it in a sermon.”? There is so much more you could say, but if I were to say to you, “Jesus says here that you should pray and not faint, and what He means is you should pray and not give up,” then I have probably said all that I need to say. I can keep talking. I can say, “Now we

recognize here that this is the iterative use of the Greek present tense.” People will say, “Huh?” There are times when I will need to explain the iterative nature of the Greek present tense, that it is something that goes on again and again and again without stopping, but it is probably sufficient in this particular case to say, “What this means is that you should not give up on what you are praying about. Just because there has not been an answer yet, do not give up.” Do you hear all the good English words? This is a little frustrating to us, but I sometimes just ask you to go listen to the sermons that you hear. What will stay in your academic brain is the one or two places in the sermon where the pastor does argument, and he is logically building a case, and it does require some Greek or some doctrinal context or some historical background. That sticks out in our brain, but if you will listen to the rest of the sermon, you will find that most often what happens is that he will say something like this: “What we understand here is that prayer is not something that we should give up on. Look at verse 1. Jesus says, ‘pray and do not give up.’” That was the end of the explanation.

So repetition and restatement are the tools we use 85% to 90% of the time. We use them most of the time. Now why am I taking care to say this? Remember that earlier I was saying that the goal of the best exposition is to convince people that they can read the text. So I say, “Here is the principle. Look at your text. What does it say?” And when I simply locate in the text that key phrase or key sentence that exactly deals with what I am saying, people say, “Oh, that is what it means. I can read that. I can understand that.” So the preacher who is helping people find their way through the text occasionally has to explain the road signs. Occasionally he has to translate something from a different language, but most of the time he simply has to say, “Look at the sign; that will get you through.” So repetition and restatement are the tools that we most often use.

That brings me to an important point that we have alluded to before: you owe nothing more to explanation than what is necessary to make the point clear but also nothing less than what is necessary to prove the point. So as a good expositor, you take the shortest course that you can. You ask, “What is the best way, the simplest way, the plainest way that I can make it clear?” You owe nothing more than what is necessary to make the point clear but nothing less than what is necessary to prove the point. So, granted, if repetition is not enough to prove the point, then you need to move on to definition or argument. You keep going if repetition is not enough, but if it is enough, you can stop there and move on to the more difficult things or what is later in the passage. I hope you hear me saying that I am not trying to diminish in any way the wonder and the goodness of the tools that you are getting in seminary. To be able to exegete a text in its original language is a wonderful thing. You rightly say, “Wow, I can do this. This is great!” But the great goal of preaching is not to show people the sweat of your labor but rather to show them the fruit of your labor. Good expositors say, “You can understand. Let me show you that you can do this” and only occasionally bring out the heavyweight tools when they are necessary.

I want to move on to the standard questions of explanation that help us think through the process. If I were listening to you preach and I had questions about the text, what would they be? They would be the five “W’s” and an “H.” What are they? “Who, what, when, where, why, and how.” So we look at a text, and we just ask these basic questions. We have begun to see the biblical pattern that happens over and over again dealing with these aspects. We have already looked at Luke 24, where Jesus explained what all the Scriptures said about Himself. Jesus sat down, in Luke 4, and explained the Scriptures. Paul reasoned in the synagogue. If you look at these passages, you will see the general processes. These are just standard things that occur in terms of how passages are explained, but now we see this important note. What we are now calling explanation is what traditionally is considered to be all that exposition includes. People’s instinct is that exposition is explaining the text, giving those definitions, descriptions, and arguments. Exposition is often considered to be concluded when the explanation is finished, but explanation is not finished when I have said to you, “This is the definition of the words. This is what this

text means.” Why is explanation not done at that point? If I give you all the Greek words for prayer and I give you all the Hebrew words for prayer, and I tell you the places in Scripture where prayer occurs, and I tell you that disciples pray, do you now know what prayer is? What is lacking for you to know the meaning of prayer is actually doing it. You still lack application. You can get the information, but until you are able to apply it to your life as a believer, as a disciple, you really do not know what prayer is. I can talk to you all day long, but until you and I get on our knees, you will not know what prayer is. Preaching is moving people to that action basis for understanding the Word. It is the difference between abstraction and praxis. Praxis is doing what the doctrine says, which is what we are equipping people to do in preaching—not just giving them information about the text. I occasionally have heard preachers say, “Now there is really no application of this text; I just need you to know this,” and I think, “Wait! That is not why the Holy Spirit put it here. He said He had a purpose for it.” That is why, until we have moved into the purpose, we have not really explained the text. Until I know the purpose, I do not know what the text means to me. So we need to keep moving and think about the other elements of exposition.

Exposition must include three elements. What are the essential elements of, we might say, full exposition? They are explanation, illustration, and application. Explanation establishes the truth. Illustration demonstrates the truth—“Let me show you in real life where this makes a difference. Let me demonstrate this truth as well.” Application applies the truth.

Just to be very straightforward with you, you must know that in the history of preaching, each one of these elements has historically been questioned as to whether it is necessary for preaching. The *solus verbi* folk, “the Word alone,” have questioned the use of explanation. The *solus verbi* people were the Huguenots, the French Reformers. They felt that it was not the role of preachers to explain the Word, because that was presuming that the preacher could do more than the Spirit Himself had done. They believed that the goal was simply to read the Word to God’s people, and the Huguenot services were often just readings. Now, were people saved and converted and wonderfully helped by those sermons? Surely much good did come from them, but I am guessing that you think that we need more than to read the text to people. I am guessing you believe that there is some reason for explanation in this day and age, where people need to know what those words mean even if they are in English. However, it is important that you know that in the history of preaching, some have questioned whether there should be any explanation at all.

Have there been times when people have questioned illustration? Surely there have. Many of us are in Reformed circles where people just do not like the idea of introducing illustrations into a sermon because it is perceived as catering to an entertainment culture. The idea is that by using illustrations, we have capitulated. We are telling “little tales for little minds” to all those television-addicted people. We are in a television age, but now here we go just surrendering to the age by using illustrations in our sermons. Can you think of anyone in the Bible who used illustrations when he preached? Well, there was one person. Let me see if I can think who that was. It was Jesus, of course! The Scriptures say that “without a parable He did not say anything to them.” So it was certainly integral to the Scriptures to have illustration.

Has there been any period in history in which people have questioned the necessity of application in preaching? Yes, it has a name, *solus Spiritus*, “the Spirit alone.” This view holds that it is not the responsibility of the preacher to apply the Word but the responsibility of the Holy Spirit, and if the preacher tries, he will get in the way. Some of you may know that the historic Dutch Reformed Church has had grave concerns about the application of the Word. However, what I need you to hear about these specific periods in which there were questions about these elements is if you look across all periods of preaching, there has never been any great preaching that has not involved all three elements. If you go

back to the earliest times that we have history of preaching sermons as we know them, all the way into the present time, you will see that great preaching has always included these three elements. Now, it has included different proportions of those elements, granted, but it has included all of the elements, and that is what we will do in Preparation and Delivery of Sermons. We have said that it is a classical model. We will learn to use all three elements, and we will recognize that later on you will make choices—given the nature of your people, the nature of your context, even the nature of your subject—about the proportion of the elements that you will use in different sermons. However, what we will not do is say, “You know what, I just do not like illustration, so I am not going to do that.” Even if you do not like it, there are people in your congregation who need it, so we are going to learn to serve our people by making sure that we learn all three elements, and then we will make prudential choices later on about proportions.

So here is the idea: all three will be included. We will not be so concerned about the order. The standard order is explanation first, then illustration, then application, but we recognize that the idea is for all three to be included, not necessarily in a particular order. We will know over time that they can switch order, but we need all three to be present for the exposition to be complete. As we think about illustrative material and what illustration involves, there are four types of illustrative material. (Again, we will develop these later but mention them now just to get them in front of you.)

The first type of illustrative material is factual information outside of the text. This would include, for example, statistics. I may be preaching on a passage that deals with sexual unfaithfulness, and I may simply quote statistics of either sexually transmitted diseases or the incidence of abortion or the incidence of illegitimate birth. I may just use statistics. They are not out of the text, but they are illustrative of what the text is talking about as the consequences of sin. So this type of illustrative material could be statistics, expert analysis, citations of events or examples from other sources, or other factual information outside of the text.

Another standard form of illustration is quotations from outside of the text. These could be poems, hymns, or striking statements from others like other preachers or perhaps commentators. Now, I want to talk for a moment about the appropriate way to deliver quotations, because even though you write it down and you really like going to other people, what do we have to be very aware of in this age? How much and how long can you use poetry in a text today? Not much. Today, we cannot use numerous and lengthy quotations. Now I think you have to recognize that you look at a lot of great sermons in the past and in different ages, where people were much more accustomed to listening to literary material, you will find lengthy quotations from poems or other authors. Today, it is very difficult even to read from a commentator beyond a sentence or two. People just kind of tune out. Two things are happening. The first is that you are using words other than your own, so the cadence sounds unfamiliar. It often sounds academic or literary in ways that signal to people that they cannot understand because you are not talking normally anymore. The other thing that happens is that when you start reading, you start looking down. You break eye contact, and you immediately turn people away. It signals that this is something that is not as important as what you are saying when you are looking at your listeners. Now you do not mean that. Usually you are citing that quotation because you think it is more important. You think that you have someone who says something better than you can say it, in a particularly moving or credible way. You want that source. Now that is very important to do, but because we recognize all the difficulties of people holding on to quotations when we use them, there are just some standard things that we do when we use quotations.

First, we should be very brief when using quotations. Second, before we read the quotation, we say why we are using it. We say something like, “Here is what I want you to listen for” or “Listen to how so-and-so says this so beautifully,” and you define what you mean by “this.” So you tell them what you want



them to listen to in the quotation. Third, we cite essential sources only. A sermon is not an essay. It is not a research paper, so we do not say, “Charles Swindoll, in his book, *Improving Your Sermon*, Multnomah Press, 1989, page 43....” We do not say that. What do we say? “Charles Swindoll says...” Maybe I need to say the title of the book, but somehow I will take the briefest time I can to make it clear. “Elizabeth Barrett Browning says this in beautiful terms.” I do not say the title of the poem and when it was written and the location of her house and her address. What is the quickest way? It is not a research paper; it is a sermon, so I am getting what I can in front of people as quickly as possible. The final rule is that I look at people and read as little as possible. It is the process that preachers call “ladling.” This is an image of a ladle, like when your mom ladled soup out of a big pot. She reached down in, dipped down, and then poured it out into the bowl. What we are doing when we are reading quotations is we read down, capture the words, and then we look up at people. I keep “ladling” with my eyes. I keep trying to pull you in, rather than create a shell like a turtle where my head goes down and my eyes go down and I cut you out. So I am ladling out to you as a means of keeping people with quotations.

Another form of illustration is imagistic language—metaphors, similes, and word pictures. It is very necessary in our culture today to preach with lots of word pictures. Here is an example: “We have to understand that the internet is really that. It is a net for many people. It captures them and holds them, and they drown in that net.” Do you hear how I use that “net” language? So imagistic language is very important in today’s culture, but obviously the big thing that I have not yet said in this list of illustrative material is true illustrations.

True illustrations for preachers are not just illustrative material. Your instincts already tell you what they are. They are small stories, usually a paragraph or two long. You will get an idea if you go to the library and you begin to look up those books that have illustrations for preachers, like White’s *10,000 Illustrations for Preaching*. Now, some of those are really terrible, but some of them are good, and at times you will need things like that to be catalysts for your own thought in those kinds of illustrations. Those books will give you an idea of what the standard length is. Looking at those will show you what the ears of Western people in Western culture are accustomed to hearing in terms of type and length of illustration. So an illustration is a small story. You are not just citing a statistic. We are doing human interest accounts—people in interaction with people, an event of some sort that is described, people in a conversation, people in interaction, a human interest account. So it is not just a statistic cited or an allusion to something that happened in the Bible. It is the retelling of a small story, usually a paragraph to two paragraphs long. So a true illustration is a short narrative.

Where do we get illustrations? What are our sources? There are three. The first is contemporary accounts, either gleaned from others or personally experienced. Illustrations gleaned from others are when you read something or you hear something. There is absolutely nothing wrong with taking stories from other preachers, so long as you give them credit. And we will learn ways of doing that. By the way, do I have to say, “I heard Tim Keller preach this in New York City”? Do I have to say that? I do not have to say that. My credibility and my integrity are intact as long as I say, “You know, I have heard someone say” or “Preachers talk about” or “I once heard” or “I read that....” As long as you give the credit away, you can use it.

Where people get into trouble is that they do not use those words, and therefore they are saying implicitly, “I came up with this.” That is where preachers lose their jobs. They do, and it is epidemic right now in this culture. There are two main factors in this: it is the availability of sermon tapes and illustrations and sermons on the web. We have so much availability to well known preachers or obscure preachers that it is so easy to pick things up and think, “No one will ever know that I got this from

someone else.” The trouble is that everyone else is out there looking for those sermons and seeing those things. Some of the former pastors of some of the largest churches in the country right now are out of jobs because they simply used sermons and illustrations and did not give the credit, and it would have been so easy to just say, “I have read that” or “I heard that” or “someone says that...” As long as you give the credit away, you are fine. Now, sometimes you want more source information, right? You actually want to say, “Sinclair Ferguson, in his book on the Holy Spirit,” and the reason you want to say his name is that you know you are about to say something controversial, and you want his credentials. Sometimes you want to do it that way. But if it is just something that you know will grip people, not because you need the credentials, just say something like, “You know, preachers tell the account that,” and then go right ahead, and you can use it.

Contemporary accounts are one source of illustration. A second source is historical accounts—something that you have read or known about from history. Of course, we use these over and over again. We will talk about how to contemporize them, though. To listen to an historical account in archaic language is very difficult for people today, so we will learn how to contemporize historical accounts and make them livable again.

There is another source of illustration. We have contemporary accounts, historical accounts, and biblical accounts. The Bible has many places you can go to say, “Here is an example. Here is where we see somebody trusting in God or failing to trust God.” The Bible itself has the great wisdom of not only giving propositional truth, but also linking it to historical narratives and parables, because the Bible knows that when people cannot only hear doctrinal truth but see it lived out in people’s lives, it has great power. In fact, if the Bible were only propositions, stated in Hebrew terms long ago, without the narratives of people living it out, we would not know what the Bible means anymore. The way in which we lock down meaning scripturally is, for example, we have the Ten Commandments, and then we see people in Scripture living them out both positively and negatively. That is how we know what those commandments mean. If it had just been the commandments by themselves, we would not have the full meaning that we have from the historical narratives going along with them. So illustrations do all of these things, and we function very well when we say, “You know what? The Bible is explaining what that means illustratively, and maybe that is the best illustration in this particular account.”

The two main dangers of illustration are that they can be overused or underused. When illustrations are overused, preaching deteriorates into mere entertainment. When illustrations are underused, preaching arrogates into mere abstraction. The traditional purpose, that is, the primary purpose traditionally, of illustrations, is to make the abstract familiar and the principle particular. That is what everyone would say historically. We use illustrations to make the abstract familiar and the principle particular. And the reason is that we know this: real meaning is not known if truth is not related to concrete life so that it can be applied. Steve Brown is a good friend of mine, and he likes to say things very baldly, but he says it this way: “If you cannot illustrate it, it is not true.” You might think that is too strong a way to put it, but what is he trying to say? He is saying that if you, the preacher, cannot figure out where this has meaning in real life, how are the people going to figure it out? If the preacher cannot figure out how this would have some concrete, lived-out example in life, then how in the world do you expect the people to whom you are preaching to be able to put it together? So he says, “If you cannot illustrate it, it is not true,” and by that he means that it does not have meaning to people.

But that begins to say something else, and that is this: for this reason, because we want to concretize truth in such a way that it can be lived out, the supreme purpose of illustration is not to clarify but to motivate. Motivation, not clarification, is the supreme purpose of illustration. Do you remember what we are trying to do? You now know the abstract truth, and I want you to live it out. Now what we will

typically do in an academic environment is that I will say to myself, “You know what illustration is about? It is about making the abstract familiar. So if what I have said is very clear, then I do not need an illustration.” Exactly the opposite is true. We are not primarily using illustrations to make a point clear. In fact, if it is not clear before you illustrate, the illustration will probably not help. What we are doing with illustration is trying to make you feel and live out the truth that you now clearly know. The primary purpose of illustration is not to clarify. Now it does have that purpose, and it can help in many ways, but the primary reason for illustration is to motivate people to do what they now know to do. If you do not realize that, what you will say is, “I have made this very clear, so I do not need to illustrate,” and despite your best intentions, what you just did was create abstraction. You have said that this does not connect to the real world; it may be clear, but it does not connect. So the reason that we illustrate is to make the connection to the real world so that people can live it out. Often, in illustrations, I am reaching for the heart. The explanation often reaches for the mind so that people will understand. In illustration, I am often trying to involve people’s sense of wonder or grief or mercy, to make it touch them as well as to have them understand. So illustrations are part of exposition in that they move beyond the mere mental understanding and into trying to make people apply through making things concrete.

Scripture gives us confirmation of the importance of these concrete particulars. We already looked at Mark 4:34, which says, “Without a parable he did not say anything to the people.” Did the apostle Paul, who could be very abstract, ever use illustrations? Well, of course he did. He would use them over and over and over again. Prophets used illustrations. Examples would include lying on one side for six months or talking about a ripe fruit basket. What were they doing? They were saying, “Here is the truth in a way that you can understand it.” Of course, Jesus Himself is the great user of illustrations.

Someone might ask for an example of an illustration that is not merely clarifying but is seeking to motivate people with the truth that they now know. You must know that just because of the circumstances of my own life, what is most in my brain is the sermon that I preached yesterday. My text was simply, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God,” so I was saying that being poor in spirit does not disqualify from the kingdom of God, and the fact that my friend rejected the hand of God does not mean that God’s hand rejected him. Now that is a very simple truth, but the account I told was an account of my son at a time when he was being treated for a disease, and the drugs powerfully affected his emotions. I just remembered a time in which I reached out to my son, and my son, in a very uncharacteristic way, struck my hands away. He did not want me to touch him, and I said that not only did it startle me, but it sent him deeper into depression because he never knew that he could do such a thing. What I needed him to know, so that he would keep taking the medicine, was that even though he had struck my hands away, my hands would never stop reaching for him. Now I knew something of what had gone on in that church, and I knew that many people in that church had reached out to the pastor, but he had struck away their hands. And so I wanted not just to say, “I want you to know this abstract truth, that God continues to care for those who reject Him, but I want you to feel deeply in your heart this profound truth, that even when you have brushed away the hands of God and others, God’s hands do not stop reaching out for you.” Now I will grant you that I think they well understood the abstract truth the first time I said it. However, I am not after just their heads, but I am after their hearts. I want them to feel deeply what I am saying beyond a level of mere cognition. I want them to feel the emotional, spiritual weight of this notion, of a father not ever willing to take his hands away from a son he loves. I wanted them to feel that in that moment for this pastor whom they were not just sad about but also angry with. This man had taken his own life. They were angry with him, and I wanted them to feel the weight of all those aspects of, “I know you reached out to him, and I know he brushed your hands away, but what is God’s attitude toward him? That has to be our attitude toward him.” I think what we are saying is that, in illustrations, a preacher is not only trying to teach his people

but also to pastor them, to make them feel the weight of a truth in their experience as well as in their cognition.

There are two standard ways of using illustrations relative to truth. One is deductive, in which we state the truth and then we move to the particular. That is a deductive method, but of course that is only one of the two major forms of cognition. The other is inductive, in which we give the particular, the illustration, and then we indicate what truth comes out of it, so in very formal terms, an introduction is typically inductive. We give the illustration and then we move to the principle, which is the proposition, whereas main points are typically deductive. We give the truth and then move to the particulars. We recognize, as I said before, that these pieces can be flipped. There is no standard order, because things are legitimately inductive or deductive. We can turn the order either way, but the point is that they are connected. One leads to the other before the exposition is complete. To dispense with one is what makes it incomplete.

The last major category, we know, is application. We have discussed explanation and illustration, and then application is the final major part of exposition. Application is answering the question, “What does this text mean to me?” Dr. Rayburn’s basic question is, “So what?” So application answer that “so what?” The importance of application, as I have already said to you, has sometimes been debated in the history of preaching, but John Broadus, the father of expository preaching, said that application is the main thing to be done. In saying that, he is saying that we are not ministers of information, but we are ministers of transformation. So my goal even in making a truth known and giving information about it is to bring transforming truth into people’s lives. It is the truth that transforms. If we do not remember the end goal, the purpose, we may begin to preach so that people will pass information tests, but the goal of preaching is to have a change of the will, to bring not only behavior change but also change of mind and heart as well. Application is part of that.

There are four components of application. The first we call instructional specificity. It answers the question, “What should I do?” Many people think that is all application is, but it is not. It is just the first component. The first component is answering the question, “What should I do? What does this text require me to do or believe or accept or change?” A second component is situational specificity, that is, not only what should I do, but where should I do this? Where in life should I do this? Now we teased about this a little bit before, but remember how you find situational specificity. You go in through the “who-door.” You ask the question, “Who in my congregation needs to hear this? I just said that God knows tomorrow. Who in my congregation needs to hear that?” Now, do I name them in the sermon? No, but I describe their situation. I do not identify their person; I identify their situation. “There are people here today who are struggling with...” or “There are people here who are wondering about...” In yesterday’s sermon, I simply said, “Is there anyone here who is poor in spirit? This text is talking about you.” So I am trying to say that this applies to your life, and the way we do that is that we make sure that we are not only saying, “Here is the behavioral implication,” but also saying, “Here in your life is where it applies.”

Now here is where the *solus Spiritus* people get quite concerned, because they say, “Now this is just the problem I was concerned about. When you start talking about individual situations, you have now limited the work of the Holy Spirit. You have said that this great biblical truth only applies to this situation, and there are people in lots of different situations.” Now we have to say there is a lot of good sound logic and theology in that objection, so we meet it in two ways. The first is just by understanding this: in preaching, the particular is the universal. This is just a principle, that the particular is the universal. You know this old maxim of preaching: if you try to speak to everyone, you speak to no one, but if you speak to someone, everyone listens. So we will say that just by being particular, we are saying

that this abstraction has some meaning in real life for someone, and then we identify the situation. Then we will do one more step, which we will talk a lot about when we get to application. We will say, “By the way, I am not going to limit it to this one situation. I will develop the light of God’s Word in this situation so you will see it has real life significance, and then having developed that light, I will say that this truth applies to someone in this other situation and this other situation as well.” Now I will not discover those other situations with as great an intensity or as much discussion, but I will develop the light in one context and then I will say, “Now that you know how that light is developed, you need to consider it in this context and this context, too.” Where do I get those contexts? I am not just exegeting the text, but I am also exegeting the people. I am a pastor. I know them. I love them. I live in their lives. I know what they must hear. Sometimes the issues are too sensitive, and I cannot describe in detail what I know to be the most sensitive situation. I have to develop the principles in a less-sensitive situation, but then I say, “But now that you know the principles, what about this situation that is more sensitive?” So we use our tools prudentially and pastorally, but we are still saying, “I have to show you that this has meaning in real life by knowing the situations that you face and saying not only what to do but where to do it.”

Two more questions need to be answered for application. Enablement means not only what to do and where to do it, but how do I do it? The fourth is proper motivation. Why should I do it? You can give all kinds of wonderful good instruction on why you should have a devotional life and why you should read the Bible and then end up by saying, “because you know, if you do not, God will get you.” Now everything that I may have just said may be proper and good about how you can do devotions and good ways to do them and situations in which you should do them, but if I end with that motivation—“You should do it, because if you do not, God will get you.”—then even though everything I said was right, the motivation makes it wrong. Right things for the wrong reasons are still wrong, so I have to make sure the motivation is also in place. The first two questions, what to do and where to do it, we will include in every main point. The second two questions, why and how, have to be included somewhere in the sermon, because sometimes the whole sermon is developing the answers to the questions of why to do it and how to do it. So we will say what and where in every main point, but why and how must be addressed somewhere in the sermon to properly drive those applications.

You have to recognize this: the chief constraint of the preacher is faithfulness to the Word of God. The chief duty of the preacher is application of the Word of God. Do you hear the difference? The chief constraint is faithfulness to the Word; the chief duty is application of the Word. If we think of all these things, how they come together, there is kind of a standard way that we think of giving life to these bones of preaching. And we think of what goes into this explanation component, and it can be described in this kind of standard double helix, which I hope reminds you of a DNA chain of some sort. The standard order will typically be explanation—“what does the Word mean?”—illustration—“show me what it means; demonstrate that truth”—and then the last one will be application—“apply the meaning of the Word to my life.” So the generic shape, if you made these three components equal, with each taking up 1/3 of each main point, would be explanation, illustration, and application, in standard proportions. But we recognize there can be kind of a standard academic seminarian error. That is not to have equal proportions, but rather to have  $\frac{3}{4}$  explanation,  $\frac{1}{4}$  illustration, and one sentence of application.

“Therefore go thou and do likewise” is a stereotypical seminarian’s application. If you are answering the four questions of application—what to do, where to do it, how to do it, and why to do it—you cannot do it in one sentence. It must come out of even the way that you are forming your explanation. That means that you begin to recognize, I hope, that though we separate out this taxonomy out into three major components (explanation, illustration, application), the more you preach, the more you recognize that these categories implode. They roll in on one another. Did Jesus explain as He gave a parable? Of course

He did. So while we have a kind of way of thinking about the message's components, we recognize that they interact and interrelate. So if this is kind of the standard seminary error, we would recognize that there is another error—the popular error. This error is  $\frac{1}{4}$  explanation,  $\frac{3}{4}$  illustration, and one sentence of application. This error very much pushes on the illustration component.

What I hope you recognize is that none of these is right in and of itself or necessarily even wrong in and of itself. Where we will ultimately determine these proportions is not only by the nature of the text but also by the nature of those to whom we are reaching. If you are preaching to a high school group, which many of you are doing even now while you are in seminary, which of these components typically gets larger in proportion in the message, if you are speaking to high schoolers? Illustration will probably grow, because you are not just exegeting the text, but you are exegeting your listeners. The Westminster Confession says, "...speaking to the necessities and the capacities of the hearers." Are you just thinking about what your capacities are, or are you thinking about what your hearers' capacities are?

Now this will be different if you are speaking to a professional group, and there are whole churches like this. I can think of one in Augusta, Georgia, that is basically made up of young professionals, people who are in legal and medical training. Which of these components will probably grow the largest when you are speaking to young professionals? Explanation will probably grow the largest. You may feel much more comfortable with this group than with the high school group. These young professionals are people whom you will strongly identify with in academic training.

Things will also be different if you are dealing with, let us say, a blue-collar crowd. The churches that I ministered to were primarily made up of manufacturers and farmers. Which of these components will become the largest with that group? Probably application. These people will say, "Tell me what I should do in life." So people who are in positions of supervision and management, professional people, may say, "Give me explanation and let me figure it out," but people who are in a very different place in life may say, "I need the instruction so that I know what to be doing in life," and then you want to increase the application component.

My main concern in showing you this is that you recognize that the evangelical instinct is for a kind of balance. All of us tire of sermons that are mere abstraction, and all of us become angered by sermons that are mere illustration. We have this instinct of wanting the preacher to tell us what it means, to show us what it means, and to apply it and help me to apply it. When those instincts are being met, we very much feel that we have been pastored as well as preached to. That is the goal of our sermons, to make sure that we are exegeting the text and the congregation, so that those things are coming together. The place where we go wrong is thinking that everyone to whom we are speaking is like us. I think that one of the great gifts of your generation is that, so much more than when I was in school, you have been taught that there are different kinds of learners as well as different kinds of people. In this you recognize that there are those who are very strongly visually oriented. There are those who are very linear and logically oriented, and you have learned to value them all. And when preaching recognizes each of these components and the value of each, then it says, "I am going to pastor all these different kinds of people by not just throwing away any of these components because of my preference. I am going to minister to all, because that is what I am called to do here." Each of these components gives me the ability to do that. The way Dr. Rayburn used to do it when he went through this lecture is that he would say, "Here is what I want you to recognize. I do not want you to picture yourself in a church. I want you to picture yourself 20 years from now in a dark alley. It has no opening beyond the one you must come back out through, and I am standing there. I have a frown on my face, and I have a question for you: what are the three components of every main point in an expository sermon? What are they?" The three components of every main point are explanation, illustration, and application.

And so upon some midnight dreary, when you are writing, tired and weary, remember this word of exhortation, the rule of all homiletic creation, for every single main point's exposition, include explanation, illustration, application. That is what we will be doing.

Next time we will be working on introductions, but also we will move briefly back into lesson 7.

## **Sermon Divisions and Development**

Let us begin with some review questions. The first question is what are three major components of exposition evident in Old Testament models that were systematized in synagogue worship patterns reflected in the New Testament? That is a very long question that asks what pattern for presenting and preaching biblical texts was established in the Old Testament and continues into the New Testament. You have presentation of the Word, then explanation of the Word, then exhortation based on the Word. Remember that pattern that you saw from Nehemiah that picks up and moves through the Bible.

The next question is what are three essential elements of exposition that are to be included in every main point? We would, of course, have to specify that this is in a formal, traditional sermon. We recognize that these will be varied, but if you are looking at a formal main point, you will always have included explanation, illustration, and application. Those are the three formal elements.

The next question is, shall we say, very stereotypical, and we have to acknowledge that: what is the proportion of these expositional elements for a general audience? For a very generic sermon, explanation, illustration, and application would occur in equal proportion. Each element would take up a third of the explanation, but the next question is even more critical. It is how may a double helix represent the expositional structure of a sermon's main points and how may this structure vary depending on target audience? This means, of course, that explanation, illustration, and application may vary tremendously. In other words, if you are looking at that double helix, those bubbles may swell or shrink according to the nature of the subject, the nature of the audience, the nature of the preacher, and the nature of the situation. We recognize many variables there. I would like for you to be able to reproduce the double helix and begin to explain its components. We are going to keep adding to it, but it is very common that I will ask you to tell me what the components are and how they vary. We will see that they get more involved as we go.

I want to review one final thing. It is often important to distinguish the Scripture introduction from the sermon introduction. The Scripture introduction introduces the Scripture reading. The sermon introduction introduces the sermon. It is important not to confuse those two elements, because sometimes we actually deaden the beginning of the sermon by confusing those two elements.

Let us pray, and we will move forward.

*Father, we call You our Lord and Master. We do so because You give us direction and requirements, but You also provide what You require, so You are not merely our Master but our Redeemer. We would ask this day that You would teach us to be dependent on You, not merely for great matters and the times of extremity, but Father, in the ordinary course of life, this class period, and what we do the rest of this day, what we think about as we are preparing these messages for Your people long-term. Please help us, even in our hearts now, to be saying, "Lord, do not send us up to do this task if You do not go with us." Send Your Spirit, even now, to equip us for the purposes to which You call us. We ask Your aid, Your blessing, Your enablement, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Here is what we are doing today. The goal for the lesson is to understand the basic subdivisions of a sermon. The key there is the word "sub." We want to understand the basic subdivisions of a sermon in standard expository development.



First, here is the big picture of where we have been and where we are going. We are zooming in from where we have been. We started out by talking about the general nature of preaching the Word of God, the nature of the servant of the Word of God, the idea of what is in the text, what the text is like, rules and ideas for selecting texts, and tools for interpreting the text. At some point we had to start dealing with the text, and so we began constructing sermons, which we said means taking that exegetical material that comes out of the exegetical outline and other research and beginning to enfold that into a homiletical outline. We have seen this structure take some form now, in the course of these weeks, in which we recognize that there is a Scripture reading, and the preaching is based on that reading of the Word. There is also, as we learned last time, a Scripture introduction. We began to move on in our taxonomy here and get terms to deal with the anatomy of a sermon. We know that the Scripture introduction actually has elements in it, like the “C-and-C,” or contextualization and creation of longing. The Scripture introduction is fairly brief, but we are trying to get people into the reading of the Word. We know that after the reading of the Word there will be an introduction. This is the sermon introduction, and we began to recognize this itself had various components. It is intended to arouse attention, introduce the subject, give an identifiable fallen condition focus (FCF), prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology, and bond to Scripture. So we recognized that there were these various components of the introduction, which was getting us ready for the proposition, and we recognized that the proposition had its own components. Its components were “what is true and what to do about it.” Do you remember? The principle and the application were the components of the proposition.

Now we have begun to look at the body of the sermon, and we began doing that by thinking of the skeleton, which represents the main point structures. So we see that there are these big “ribs,” as it were, of the sermon, which are the main point structure. Then we said we have to define the meat that is going onto these bones, so we began to look at main points. We recognized that they have a configuration themselves, and we described it as this double helix, which was composed of explanation, illustration, and application. We know that these components can change places. They do not have to be in that standard order. They usually are, but they do not have to be.

So we have looked at explanation, illustration, and application, and where we are today is asking what the components of the explanation are. We will begin to think of the components of that specific piece, and of course we know that later on we will look at the components of illustration and application. For today, however, we are going to look at the components of the explanation, particularly its minor ribs. We are going to begin to look at some of the structure of the subpoints.

You see, then, we are ready now to begin analyzing the divisions of explanation within the main points. However, before we go in and begin to look at that structure, I do want to back up just a little bit and remind ourselves of the guidelines for the main point divisions themselves. As we think of these big pieces, we need to think again about the strategy that we were dealing with when we considered the number and nature of the main points. There are going to be three of these. There are three things we need to consider for the number and the nature of the main points. You will hear them, and you will say, “Of course.” These are commonsensical things, but they help us get ready for thinking about what subpoints are.

The first consideration is this: in determining the number and nature of main points, we use the number of divisions necessary to present the thought of the passage. The key phrase here is “present the thought.” We use the number of divisions necessary to present the thought of the passage, so whatever is necessary to capture the thought of the passage in front of us, that is how we choose the number of main points. We have said that there could be three-point messages. That is kind of standard, but we know

that there could be two-point messages. There can be messages with four or more points. Sometimes, we will discover later, there can be one-point messages, but we will choose the number of divisions necessary to present the thought of the passage.

The second consideration is this: We will use the number of divisions necessary to cover the territory. The expositor's ethic is to open the Bible and say, "Let me tell you what this passage says. Let me tell you what this passage means." Now, when I do that, if I say, "So I will explain verse 1, and I will explain verse 2, and I will explain verse 4, and I will explain verse 5," what did I just fail to do? I did not explain verse 3. That is what covering the territory is about. I will cover the territory of the passage that I present as the expository unit, because I have said to you, as an expositor, that I will explain what this means. If I just skip portions, I cannot do that. Now, does that mean we must cover every portion equally? No! Some portions will need a lot of attention, and some will need a little attention. Sometimes you might take three verses and group them into one main point. You might take another verse and divide it into four subpoints. Coverage will vary, depending on the amount of attention you feel is necessary to explain the passage, but the goal is to cover the territory. The old language, and you will still see it in a lot of homiletics textbooks, is "to exhaust the passage." That was the old language. That a little problematic to our ears, because we typically think about the inexhaustible riches of the Word of God. You will never get to the bottom of any passage of Scripture. You will never plumb the full depths of the Word, but that was not really what the old language meant. It really meant to cover the territory, so that is what we are going to remind ourselves to do as well—to cover the territory.

These first two considerations were about presenting the thought of the passage and covering the territory of the passage. The third consideration for determining the number and nature of main points is this: we use the number of divisions necessary to organize the thought of the sermon. We must present the thought of the passage and cover the passage, but we also have to organize the thought of the sermon itself, so there are the communicative obligations also. That organization will include things like the need to choose the number of points necessary to make the message logical and proportional and progressive. It must be proportional, because we do not want one main point to last 30 seconds and the next one to last 30 minutes. It needs to be roughly, not exactly, but roughly proportional. It is also important that the sermon does not feel like we are just stuck in one place. We need to feel that we are progressing as we move through the message, so we choose the number of divisions necessary to make the sermon logical, proportional, and progressive.

Now, I think, you begin to feel that if you have a 30-minute message or so, with these main points coming every 8 to 10 minutes, they may themselves get lost. How do we connect these pieces? The answer is that we have subdivisions that are themselves anchored by subpoints. This explanation portion of the main point itself has navigation signs in it, and those navigation signs are subpoints that move us through that main point and get us to the next main point. So for a while we are going to talk about the nature of subpoints and their key characteristics.

First, subpoints complement, that is, support or prove, their specific main point. Now, as obvious as that seems, we must look at the subpoint and say, "Does it deal with my main point?" We need to ask that, because the tendency is to develop a main point that is somewhere in the passage and then begin to identify subpoints as you are simply moving through the passage, but they do not conceptually link to that main point. You are moving through the pattern of the passage but not developing the thought of your main point, which may mean that you have to move that subpoint to another main point. However you do it, you need to make sure that each subpoint complements or supports its specific main point. Do you remember the little stool with all the legs under it that I used to illustrate proposition and main points? The same stool works as an illustration for a main point and its subpoints. The main point is like

the top of the stool, and all the subpoints have to fit conceptually under that main point, like legs underneath a stool.

Second, subpoints relate to their main point in the same way. That is, they can answer a similar—not necessarily the same—diagnostic question, or they support the main point in the same way. I will give you an example, because if you hear it, you will automatically know what I am talking about. Let me give you a main point and subpoints, and you can think about which one does not fit because it does not develop the main point in the same way as the others. Just listen to it, and your ear will tell you. The proposition is “Because God is sovereign, we should honor Him.” The subpoints are, “We should obey Him,” “We should trust Him,” and “Prayer leads to godliness.” Of course, you notice that the third one is not like the others. Now, it may be a very true statement. Prayer leads to godliness. It may be within the text. It is even something about honoring a sovereign God. It may even fit conceptually, but it is not worded like the others. It does not develop the main point in a similar or same way. What question is being answered by “We should obey Him”? It is the question of how we should honor God. Because God is sovereign, we should honor Him. How should we honor Him? We should obey Him, we should trust Him, and prayer leads to godliness. Now convert the third subpoint. How could you take “prayer leads to godliness” and make it fit as a subpoint? You could say, “We should pray to Him.” You simply word it in such a way that it will answer the same or a similar diagnostic question.

What you just noticed was strong parallelism. The parallelism will usually make you word things in such a way that they develop the main point in the same way. Now they may answer slightly different questions, but they are developing the main point in the same way.

Third, subpoints are about the one thing the main point is about, not new subjects. Sometimes people confuse that. They might think, “Oh, here is a subpoint. I am talking about something else now.” No, the subpoints are subdivisions of their main point. They are not about new subjects but about the development of that subject, so they stay on the same point.

Fourth, subpoints ordinarily support or develop the developmental clause. We also call that the magnet clause of the main point. Now let us just remind ourselves again that the magnet clause is the one with the key word change that triggers the ear and causes us to say, “Oh, there is something different in that parallel phrase.” So those subpoints deal with what attracts the attention of the ear in the main point. The subpoints are about what is different in the main point, which means they support or develop the magnet clause. The very point of the magnet clause was to draw attention to itself, and therefore it draws the explanation of the subpoints. The subpoints are about the magnet clause. I will remind you quickly that you developed the anchor clause just before or after the proposition. The anchor clause of the main points, the thing that does not change, is the basis of the sermon, so the anchor clause was developed in the introduction or possibly early in the first main point. The magnet clauses, the developmental side, are the ones that are getting the attention of the explanation. The anchor clause is typically something that can be taken for granted or understood very quickly, so it is developed very early, and then the magnet clause is what draws the attention of the explanation.

For this reason, fifth, subpoints are brief statements of principle or application, not both. The word “or” is very important here. Propositions are made up of a principle and an application. Main points are made up of a principle and an application, but subpoints will only be about one side of the main point. They are only about the magnet clause, so subpoints will be principle or application, because they only develop the one side. Whatever that one side was, you typically know that is what the subpoints will be about. To put it another way, subpoints are generally not weddings of principle and application, because only the magnet clause of the main point is being proven, which is either principle or application.

This means that subpoints are usually short sentences or sentence fragments. We will see why that is in just a moment. How we set them up will determine whether they are sentences or just portions of sentences, and we will talk about that in just a minute. Sometimes subpoints are not complete sentences. They may only be sentence fragments. Here is the idea of what you are doing with subpoints. For the average listener, the sermon is coming to them like a wave or a mud wall of words. There are all these words, words, words, words coming at the listener. What subpoints are is a way of saying, “Here is a way to navigate through there.” To change the metaphor, subpoints are like a peg that you nail into the wall and then you hang the rest of the explanation on that peg. Instead of just telling you a series of facts, which would make you wonder why I am telling you all these things, I have subpoints to help you make sense of my explanation. I hammer a peg on the wall, and then I can hang lots of information on it. Then the audience understands why you are telling them the things you are telling them in your explanation. Subpoints are the thought-pegs that we begin to hang all our exegetical explanatory information on.

A brief rule of thumb is that if the explanation is longer than a long paragraph on a page, if you are getting beyond a third of a page or so, then you need another subpoint. That is a general rule of thumb. However, you do not always need subpoints. Sometimes you can function without them, because your main point may be fairly clear. If that is the case, you can just move on, but usually, if you know that you have more than a long paragraph of explanation, then you need another subpoint. Subpoints say, “Here is a large paragraph of thought. I will give you the general thought first—the peg on the door—before I start to hang all this information on it.” So subpoints give people a way to navigate through as we give them that information.

Let us go on to some of this other material that will help us, and then we will go on to look at lots of examples. Subpoints exhibit unity—that is, they are about one thing. Subpoints exhibit uniqueness—that is, they are not coexistent. We should not say to ourselves, “I thought you just said that,” when we hear the next subpoint. They are unique. They exhibit parallelism. They reflect one another in wording. They also exhibit progression. They consistently lead to the larger concept, so they are progressive as well.

Subpoints are not required, but if they are given, they must be multiple. If you have only one subpoint, it should be the main point. Subpoints are subdivisions. You do not have just one subdivision. There have to be at least two, so if you have subpoints, there should be at least two. If you have only one, look at your main point again and reword it somehow. You may decide that you do not need subpoints. You may say, “This is so clear. God says you should pray and not give up. What that means is that regardless of your circumstances, you should not give up seeking God.” Now I probably do not need to tell you about the iterative nature of the Greek present tense if that is my main point. I do not need a paragraph of explanation. I just probably need to say that, and then it is time to illustrate and apply and move on. In other words, not all main points need multiple paragraphs of explanation, which means that not all main points need subpoints. However, if a main point does have multiple paragraphs of explanation, then it typically does need subpoints for the hearers to be able to navigate through the main point.

Subpoints usually point to a specific portion of the text. That is, we often show the verse after the subpoint in our outline. We will say, “You should honor God (v. 3).” I will generally tell what portion of the text supports what I just said. However, can you think of some exceptions, where there might not be a verse reference that supports the subpoint? What other information might you import that might need to be a subpoint? The key idea here is context. There may be some historical or literary context that is not a verse in this passage, but is something that you would say, “You need to know this in order to

know what that main point is about.” Most of the time there will be a direct verse reference in the text to every subpoint. We will talk more on that later, and I will show you some examples in just a bit.

Subpoints are usually symmetrical and proportional. They are similar to each other in length, and they are proportional—that is, they divide the explanation fairly evenly. I do not have one subpoint that runs a third of a paragraph and another subpoint that runs five paragraphs. They roughly evenly divide the explanation of a main point.

This final one is the really difficult one here. Subpoints develop the homiletical outline rather than outline the text. That is, subpoints do not merely describe the text. The classic way that homileticians describe this concept is by saying, “subpoints are stated as principles, not mere statements of fact.” I will give you an example, because I know it is often confusing and difficult to understand what it means to say that subpoints do not merely describe a text.

Here is an example of subpoints that merely describe the text. My main point is “Because God blesses faithfulness, we should obey Him.” My first subpoint is “Israel confronted Jericho.” My second is “Israel marched around Jericho.” My third is “The walls of Jericho fell.” Are these true? Yes. Are they taken from the text? Yes. Do they describe accurately what happens in the text? Yes, but they are simply statements of fact. There are no principles being developed, as there are in my next example. Now recognize that this is about the same passage. The main point is “Because God blesses faithfulness, we should obey Him.” The first subpoint is “Faithfulness requires confronting God’s enemies.” That is a principle, and the fact that supports that principle is that Israel went up against Jericho. So I will bring those facts into this explanation paragraph, but the subpoint itself is worded as a principle of biblical truth. It is not just a regurgitation of the facts of the text. It is the principle the facts will support, because the idea you are ultimately developing is “We should obey Him.” So you are developing the principle in the main point, and the subpoints need to be worded as principles, also. The second subpoint is “Faithfulness requires obeying God’s Word.” The simple fact that supports this principle is that Israel marched around Jericho, and God told them to do that. Now, rather than merely stating that the walls of Jericho fell, the third subpoint is “Faithfulness results in seeing God’s hand.” That principle is supported by the fact that the walls of Jericho fell.

So subpoints should not merely restate the facts of the text. The subpoints should develop the homiletical outline, which is made up of the principles that the facts will support. The place that we will deal the most with this is actually in the next part of this course when we begin dealing with narrative passages. As we begin to look at the accounts of Scripture, that is when people are tempted to make the facts of the text the points of their outline. This semester, you are dealing with didactic passages from the epistles, so you will not typically fall into this problem of only describing the facts of the text, and that is okay, but I want you to hear that language so it can begin to develop in your brain. That is, we are developing the message; we are not merely describing the text. We are developing the message in the homiletical outline, not merely describing the text. Description of the text will certainly go into the sermon to support the principles that we say are there.

Let us move on to some basic types of subpoints to begin to think how this will occur for us. You have done main points and propositions. You have done introductions. We are moving toward conclusions and subpoints. What we are doing today is saying, “What is the nature of these subpoints?” even as we are moving toward “what is the nature of conclusions?” So let us talk about some of the specific kinds of subpoints that there are.

The first, very basic, form of subpoint is analytical question responses. These are, as the name implies, answers or responses to analytical questions. What happens with these is that for all subpoints in a main point, we ask—out loud—a question, an overarching question, like, “How do we know that this is true?” or “When should this apply in our lives?” Then we answer the question with short statements that introduce the explanations. Here is an example. The main point is “Because Jesus provides the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ despite our difficulties.” Then we ask a question about that. This is known as “interrogating the main point.” We ask an analytical question about it: “In what types of difficulties must we present Christ?” Then we answer our question: “In circumstantial difficulties, in relational difficulties, and in spiritual difficulties.” These subpoints are not complete sentences. They are sentence fragments, but they are answers to this question, which is a complete sentence. So the answer to the analytical question is what makes the thought complete. We ask a question about the main point, and then we answer that question with the subpoints. Do you see why these have the name “analytical question responses”? You have an analytical question, and the subpoints are the responses to one overarching analytical question. You might wonder if the analytical question itself is considered a subpoint. The answer is no. The analytical question gets the subpoints ready, so the analytical question just sets up the answers, which are the subpoints.

That was an analytical question response. The next major type of subpoint is very similar to them. These are interrogative subpoints. With these, we ask a new question for each subpoint. Rather than having one overarching question that we answer with the subpoints, we ask a new question for each subpoint. Now this is very important: we answer it immediately. We answer the question immediately with a concise statement, and then we show where the statement was derived and give the explanation that supports the statement. Do not delay the answer until after the explanation. The ear does not have the patience of the eye. Again, this is where sermons will differ from essays. Many of you have been taught to write essays with that very powerful method of asking questions, then developing the answer, and only then giving the answer. So the eye will say, “Here is an important question. Why is the population of Greece diminishing today?” Then you begin to list all the things that happened in Greece, and then you give the answer to your question. So we first get all these explanation and then we get the final conclusion, and the conclusion comes at the end of the paragraph or maybe even after two or three paragraphs later. We do not do that in preaching. In preaching, we say, “What types of difficulties may we face? Christ’s enemies. Look in the verse. It says ...” and then I begin to explain my answer. The question sets up the answer that is given immediately in an interrogative subpoint, and then we begin to explain how we got that answer. Again, the question itself is not a subpoint. The answer is the subpoint, which means that we will try to keep our answers, as well as the questions, as parallel as possible. It is not just the question that is parallel. We need the parallelism of the question so the ear is saying, “Oh, he is beginning another subdivision here.” So we have “What types of difficulties may we face? Christ’s enemies. What helps us to face these difficulties? Christ’s armies.” Do you hear how I am striving to get parallelism? I will explain what “Christ’s armies” means in the paragraph that follows, in looking at the text and developing what is there about Christ’s armies.

In interrogative subpoints, the questions are as parallel as possible, and the answers are as parallel as possible, too, because, technically, the answer holds the subpoint. The questions get us to the subpoint. Here is that example again. The main point is “Because Jesus provides the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ despite our difficulties.” The first clause is the anchor clause, so we are developing the second clause, “we must present Christ despite our difficulties.” If that is the main idea, we have obvious questions. “What types of difficulties may we face? Christ’s enemies.” Another main question is “Well then, what helps us face those difficulties? Christ’s armies.” So it is a way of moving through the explanation by repetitive questions. It is actually a very engaging way to preach. It is typically not the way you think of developing outlines when you write them. Most of us do bullet statements when we

do an outline, so the way we write outlines is as bullet statements, but you will often find that the way to present your outline very engagingly is to keep asking questions. Ask questions out loud and then respond to your own questions. This deals very sympathetically with the hearer. It is as if you are saying, "If I were sitting in your seat, what question would I be asking at this point?" Then you go ahead and ask it, and people are thinking, "He knows what I am thinking. That guy reads my mail! He knows exactly what is in my mind," and all you are doing is asking the questions that you would naturally ask as a listener, but you are asking the questions for the listener and then answering them as a way of developing the thought of the passage.

The last basic form of subpoints is what we probably thought would be the first form, and that is bullet statements. These are sentences or sentence fragments that are not set up by questions. They are simply statements in themselves. For example, if the main point is "Because Jesus provides the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ despite our difficulties," then the subpoints might be, "In the midst of busyness, in the face of fear, in the storm of anger." So I am simply using bullet statements to move through and develop what we do to present Christ despite our difficulties.

Now I just wanted to show you conceptually the difference between analytical question responses, interrogatives, and bullet statements, but I think you recognize that if we were actually developing this in an outline, what is missing? Verse references. There would be verse references going with each of the subpoints, so that they would typically look more like this: "Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ in difficult situations, facing circumstantial obstacles (v. 12), facing spiritual obstacles (vv. 13-14)." Now, of course, just seeing it here in an outline does not mean we are going to say it all that way. We have paragraphs of explanation now to explain verse 12 and to explain verses 13 and 14. We will begin to develop those in that paragraph of thought that falls under that subpoint. But again, the subpoint is the thought peg that we hammer on the door so we can now hang lots of information on it.

Let me show you some examples and then answer some common questions about subpoints. I will show you positive things and then negative things and begin to consider them. Listen to these subpoints and think about what type these are: "Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must preach Christ to difficult people. Who are these people? Those without mercy. How must we deal with these people? As those with mercy." What type of subpoints are these? They are interrogatives. You have a different question setting up each of the subpoints. You will notice that these subpoints are not exactly parallel, but you do see that there is an attempt to make them as parallel as possible, to try to make them as similar in wording as we can. The first was something about "without mercy," and the next is kind of a contrastive parallelism, "with mercy." We are trying to get the ear working to hear the concepts behind the main point. We recognize that though difficult people are those without mercy, we must deal with them as those who have mercy. We are those with mercy. So we are trying to get parallel wording as much as possible.

What about this one: "Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must preach Christ despite our difficulties. What sorts of difficulties? In the face of present frustration, in the face of past failure." What kind of subpoints are those? They are analytical question responses. There is one overarching question and then the responses to that one question. So those are the different types.

Let me show you a negative example: "Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must preach Christ in difficult situations. Peter ignored the authorities. Peter spoke from jail." What is the problem here? The subpoints merely describe the text rather than develop the message. It is true in the text that Peter ignored the authorities and that Peter spoke from jail. It is true, but these are not "principleized"

subpoints, as a homolexician would say. The principle is not developed. We have described the text, but we do not have wording that enables us to deal with the idea that we must preach Christ in difficult situations. What might be something that would “principleize” the truth that Peter ignored the authorities? Can you make it into a principle? We must preach Christ in difficult situations. We must preach Christ when opposition comes. I have a principle now, and I can support it with the fact that Peter went ahead and preached Christ despite the opposition of authorities. So we must preach Christ despite opposition. How about the fact that Peter spoke from jail? How can I make that a principle? We must preach Christ against all odds. Against opposition, against all odds, so you even have some assonance with the sounds there. So Peter spoke from jail against all odds. We might say, “despite circumstances” or “despite constraint.” There might be various ways that we could talk about it, but we are looking for principles, so that would be how we would identify the proper way to go there.

I will just tell you that the first clause is the anchor clause and the second clause is the magnet clause in this main point: “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must preach Christ to difficult people.” Then the subpoints are “First, Jesus died to save the ungodly. Second, Jesus alone can save.” What is the problem here? The subpoints are developing the anchor clause, but they should be developing the magnet clause. A related problem is that the subpoints are not developing the obvious question. The obvious question comes out of the magnet clause. That is the clause that the ear says, “That is what the issue is. Why are you not dealing with the issue?” So there you have somebody developing the anchor rather than the magnet clause.

Let us try one more. “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must preach Christ despite our difficulties.” The first subpoint is “Our preaching will bring hate,” and the second is “Our prayer overcomes opposition.” What are potential problems here? What is lacking in those two main points’ wording? There is no parallelism. The subpoints are true, but once you see the importance of this and begin to speak to people regularly, you will automatically hear the need for parallelism. Most ears would not even have picked these up as subpoints. They would not even have heard them as anything but part of that “mud wall” of words coming at them. Because they are not distinguished by parallelism, we do not even pick them out of the mud wall. They are just part of the mass. We do not even hear them as anything different, because they are not worded in parallel. They have no audio flags to make us say, “Oh, that is the point you are making.” Because they are not worded in parallel, they are just like every other sentence that is going by.

Now I want to answer some common questions about subpoints. Should you be very concerned in the introduction to establish the anchor clause? I think the answer is “Not really.” The anchor clause is typically something that everybody sees right away, so if you have to spend three or four paragraphs to develop the anchor clause, it probably should not be the anchor clause. The anchor clause is something that I think your instincts will tell you needs to be very obvious from the text. People are almost going to agree from the first time you say it. They should not need a lot of proof. So if your statement is something like, “Because God is sovereign, we should honor Him,” and if your real message is about what it means for God to be sovereign, then that probably ought to be the message and not, “we should honor Him.” Maybe you just need to say the anchor clause is “We should honor Him,” so the introduction is about how we should honor whoever is sovereign. People will agree with that. That does not need a lot of proof. We should honor the one who is sovereign. So you establish—I actually use the word “establish” more than I use the word “prove”—the anchor clause just before or after the proposition. If it needs a paragraph, fine. What does “sovereign” mean? It means God is in charge and you are not. That is what it means. Then we are ready to go. I probably do not want to spend a whole lot more time on the concept of sovereignty. However, if I am dealing with a congregation that has no concept of what “sovereign” means, then I may have to do a whole sermon on what it means for God to



be sovereign, and then I will really be particularizing a lot more. However, if you are simply wondering whether you need to be very concerned about developing the anchor clause in the introduction, I want to say that you should establish it, but you do not spend sentence upon sentence upon sentence doing that. If you are doing that, it is probably not the right anchor clause yet.

The next question people often ask is what the real difference is between bullet statement subpoints and analytical question responses. It is a good question, because if you actually look at them on paper, they are pretty much the same, except for the fact that there has been that overarching question. Really the only answer is that the difference is the overarching question. It is the way you get into them. Bullet statements typically are not set up by questions, whereas analytical question responses are set up by that one overarching question. Do you remember that language of “interrogating the main point”? You have a main point, and you actually ask a question about it, and it shows why you are developing the subpoints that you are. Bullets without the overarching question are usually just subdivisions of thought that do not need questions to set them up.

Another common question concerns whether you would ask the question explicitly before every subpoint. I think it is your option. If it is the same question over and over again, you might very well ask it two or three times within the development. By the way, this is also the standard way of developing main points from propositions. We interrogate the proposition. For example, “We should honor God. How do we honor God? Because he is sovereign, we obey Him. Because he is sovereign, we trust Him. Because he is sovereign, we worship Him.” That first question—“What should we do in response?”—was the overarching question even to set up the main points.

What I would love for you to do is something that our English essays have trained us not to do, and that is just to get in that oral medium of asking a lot of questions. That is the way you proceed through the message, with question upon question. As a preacher, I ask a lot of questions, and I often find that when I am in Presbyterian circles and I am asking questions, people start talking back to me. Then they get embarrassed because they are in Presbyterian circles and they think they are not supposed to do that, but it is actually, in a certain sense, the mark that I am communicating. They are so much with me now that they are starting to throw the answers back to me, and I actually like that engagement a whole lot. I think the more you communicate, the more you will find the value of sitting in the listeners’ seat and asking out loud the questions they would ask if they felt they could, so analytical question responses are just a way of getting us into that.

Another common question concerns interrogative subpoints particularly. How important is it to have parallelism in the question as well as the answer? I will just tell you what typically happens when people are writing sermons. Almost everyone puts the questions in parallel. The ear just knows to do that. Even as you are writing it out, you hear how important that is, but what people typically forget and fail to do is put their answers in parallel. We recognize that the answer should be in parallel, but we might ask whether the question needs to be in parallel. When you are writing the sermon, the opposite typically occurs. People almost always know to make their questions parallel, but they sometimes forget to make their answers parallel, so my big emphasis is on making the answers parallel. I think your instincts will tell you to make the questions parallel as well.

Someone might ask what happens if what I need to do in my subpoints is not only identify what I am saying but also what I am not saying? Just say exactly that. It is very powerful. Everybody knows exactly what you are doing and why. In fact, I think you will often find in the future, as you are preaching, that “here is what I am not saying” is a very important technique to learn. So often what people do is they impose their thoughts on what you have said. You know they are going to do it, so it is

helpful for you as a preacher to actually anticipate not only objections but also aberrations. You actually anticipate them and you say, “I am not saying this, I am not saying this, I am not saying this, I am saying this.” That is actually a very powerful strategy for communicating truth. That would not have to be in the subpoints. It could be in the main point. We will not do this in this class, but you could even say in a two-point sermon, here is what I am not saying, and here is what I am saying. You could even set up that contrast in the overall sermon, so it is often very powerful to do those things.

Are the subpoints the places that you can begin to introduce references to other passages? The answer is yes, definitely, with this qualification: so long as you prove the idea was present in the text you are preaching first, before you go over to another text. So if you are preaching from 1 Corinthians 5, and you say that we should honor God, and I see in that parenthesis after your subpoint a reference to 1 Thessalonians 4, I will say, “Now I know there is something in 1 Thessalonians 4 that supports that statement, but I want to see it first in 1 Corinthians 5 before you jump to another passage.” So you use other references to support what this text says, not to establish what this text says. They are supporting references, which means that I first have something in my text that gets me going down that path. Yes, we definitely will recognize the power of supporting texts. We will also recognize the danger of eisegesis, importing texts onto the text we are preaching on to make it say what it does not say. So establish that it is here and then support it over there, but first establish that it is here.

Here is a good question: if you use interrogatives in the first main point, do you have to use interrogatives in the second main point? The answer is absolutely not. In fact, it is really a good technique to use different kinds of subpoints within the sermon itself. The same answer applies to the number of subpoints. If you have two subpoints in the first main point, do you have to have two in the second main point? Absolutely not. Each main point is autonomous. You do whatever allows you to best explain that main point. One main point may have no subpoints. It may have three or two. They may be interrogatives or bullets or analytical question responses. Whatever allows you to best explain that main point is what you use, regardless of what you have done or will do with the other main points. That is an important question, because I know that causes confusion.

When we talk about the subpoints being parallel, you might ask whether they are parallel to each other or parallel to the main point and proposition. The answer is that they are parallel to each other. They are parallel in wording to each other, not necessarily to the main point and proposition.

One final question is this: if you are just dealing with one verse, and you are subdividing it and developing the idea from other texts, is that inappropriate? It is not inappropriate. We will actually look at in just a bit. That is technically called a textual sermon, not an expository sermon, so we will not do it this semester. We will not say that it is wrong. It has its place, but we will first do expository messages. Expository messages, by definition, take main points and subpoints from the text directly in front of us. Textual messages, by definition, take main points from the text in front of us, and they take developmental subpoints from other texts. Textual messages are not wrong. They have a rich history, but the danger of them is that we might make this text say something it does not say by pulling in those other texts first. What we are really doing this semester is locking ourselves down hermeneutically. We are asking if our interpretation is correct, so we are looking at this text, and we are saying what is true and what to do about it. Can I prove that from this text? From this text, can I establish this outline? Can I preach this message from this text? Now we know that we will do lots of other things in the future, but right now we are just making sure that we can say what God says. We are saying, “I will explain this text to you,” and that is the goal that we are striving for, knowing that more things will come in the future, but right now we are just saying, “I want this expositor’s ethic to be my own. Let me explain this text to you.” That is where we are going.

Let me just get some other information in front of you. These are just general order things that I want you to be aware of. As you think of the standard order of the divisions of the text, you now kind of see how the pieces come together. You announce the text, then you have the Scripture introduction, then you reannounce the text, then you have the Scripture reading, a prayer for illumination, introduction, propositions, and main point statements. Now look at that first main point statement. You will have a subpoint, a subpoint, and another subpoint. What we are doing there is dividing the explanation, so we have three subpoints (although it could be two or four) that divide the explanation. We will then move into illustration, then application. However, the elements do not always have to be in that order. You could have one subpoint, then an illustration, then two more subpoints, then the application. There is nothing wrong with that. We might say, “You know what? These second two subpoints will flow very easily if the listeners understand the first one. The first one is the foundation that sets up the next two, so I actually want to use my illustration to make sure this first subpoint really becomes clear to them. Then I will go back to the subpoints.” So there is not a canonical order for these elements. We can move them around.

However, I am going to ask you this semester and next semester to use one illustration for each main point. Some of you will not like that because you will not like doing illustrations. It is just not your personality and nature. Others of you love doing illustrations, and some of you will want to do an illustration for every subpoint and every sub-subpoint and every sub-sub-subpoint, and there will be illustrations all over the place. But for right now, there should be one illustration per main point. Use the illustration wherever you think you can make the best use of it. It might be after the first subpoint, before you get to the next two. It might not be there. It might be after all three. As a matter of fact, it might actually set up all three subpoints. So the idea is, wherever you can make best use of that illustration, use it there. We will talk a little bit later about how illustrations do fit and ways that we find to make them mesh with the subpoints and the explanation, but for now I just want you to recognize that you have various options of where they might fit. They do not always have to come right after all of the explanation. They might come after the portion that you think is the most significant.

The next thing I want to do is just for you to get an idea of how sermons fit together. What are the standard lengths of the major divisions of the sermon? You are now beginning to get a sense of these different pieces of a sermon, maybe in a way that you never thought of before. There are these different components of this taxonomy of the sermon. Some of you have said to me after class that you are listening to sermons these days, without a critical ear, I hope, but with a more analytical ear. You begin to hear the proposition and the introduction. You begin to hear how the preacher puts an illustration together with his explanation. You begin to hear sermons for their divisions, but now you may begin to wonder what the actual timing is that it takes to move through all these things.

This may actually surprise you. It is kind of fun to go through the first time. The text announcement and Scripture introduction usually take around a minute or maybe less, so on a page, if you look at the way the example sermon in your book is typed, that is a third of a page or less. It is hard to say exactly because there are so many different fonts, but I am referring to a typewritten page with standard formatting, single-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font. The Scripture reading goes on one or two minutes, so it is half a page if you would type it all out. The prayer for illumination is another minute, or about a third of a page. The sermon introduction usually takes two to three minutes, so a half to two-thirds of a page. The sermon conclusion takes two to three minutes, so again you have a half a page or so. The closing prayer takes a minute or two, so another half of a page. Look at what that means. You have not even gotten to the body of the sermon, and a third of your 30 minutes is gone. A third of it is gone, and you have not even gotten to the body of the sermon, but these are all necessary components in

terms of what is going into the normal preaching occasion. I recognize that some of you come from different denominations, and so things can be different in different traditions, but it is kind of interesting to see that just the Scripture reading, the prayers, the introduction and conclusion, everything that is around the body itself, takes about a third of the time. So if that is the case, if a third of your time is in that surrounding material, then you will want to know what the average times and page lengths are for the body of the 30-minute message. Well, of those 20 remaining minutes, each main point in a three-point message is roughly six minutes long. If you have three points, which is fairly standard, then each point can take six or seven minutes, which means that each main point in all its components is about two pages in length. That is about how long it goes, about two pages. How long did you think a sermon was when you first heard it? Did you think it was 20 or 25 or 30 pages? No, it will end up being about seven-and-a-half or eight pages, if you type it all out. Now most people do not type out their entire sermon, but I am telling you these lengths to give you a sense of proportion here.

Therefore if each main point is about two pages or six minutes, then if you just use a standard proportion of a third explanation, a third illustration, and a third application, each component will be about two minutes or two-thirds of a page. If you divide down that two minutes of explanation, then if you have two subpoints, each will be about a third of a page or a good long paragraph. If it becomes longer than a long paragraph, you need another subpoint. If you have a long paragraph, that typically is a subpoint. Then, of course, you have your various extemporized comments—and they are always, by the way, what get you in the most trouble—which take another two minutes or so, so the conclusion of all that is that the written content of the 30-minute sermon that includes only the Scripture introduction, sermon introduction, sermon body, and sermon conclusion, will run seven-and-a-half to eight pages. I have said this before, but a note on subpoints is that in order to accomplish the symmetry of having each component of exposition take up a third of the main point, the subpoints of explanation are usually one paragraph a piece. As a rule of thumb, explanations longer than one paragraph need subpoint divisions.

Finally, here is one more important set of thoughts. What is the standard conceptual progression of a subpoint? In other words, if I am developing subpoints of explanation, what usually happens first? What will happen is that we will say something like this: “We should honor God. Look with me at verse 2. It says, ‘In all your ways acknowledge him.’ Now what that means is that wherever we go, whatever we are facing, whatever ways God takes us in life, we should be honoring God. To acknowledge God actually in the Hebrew means...” I just did something. I said first, “It means we should honor Him.” Then I said, “Look with me at verse 2.” Then I began to explain what “acknowledge” means as it relates to “honor.” This is a standard progression that we call “state, place, prove.” I state the truth, show where it is in the text, and then begin to prove it with the explanation. So the standard conceptual progression of a point is this: first, we state the truth. We make the main point or the subpoint statement. Second, we place the truth by showing where it is in the text. Third, we prove the truth. We prove that that text says that statement that I just said. Further on, you know, we will begin to illustrate and apply, but the subpoints themselves follow this pattern of state, place, prove. We will talk more about that as we go. There are various ways to do that.

Here is a caution. You now begin to understand that you can start a main point with lots of different things. You can start with a principle statement or an illustration or even a particular application. What is the one thing, however, with which you cannot start a main point? The wording I use is “bald explanation.” Here is what you can do in preaching that people will understand precisely what you are doing. You can begin with an illustration and then show its implications. You can begin with an application and then show how you got that. You can begin with a principle statement and then show what proves the principle. What will confuse people, however, is if you just begin to give them explanations with no real particular to anchor your explanations. If you begin to talk about the aorist

tense, or the history of Israel, or the imprisonment of Paul, they will think, “Why are you telling me this?” It has no particular to anchor it. Anything will serve as a particular—a statement of truth, a statement of application, or an illustration—but what you cannot do is just start giving explanation to people without some kind of particular. That is called “bald explanation,” when you just begin to tell people things without giving them a basis for why you are telling them these things. So that is the one thing with which you cannot begin.

What we are doing now is a fairly formal approach, learning the pieces and seeing how they unfold. Where we are going is toward main points with subpoints and conclusions, so if you want to begin working toward where we are going, then you should begin to think about subpoints and what you will be doing to develop subpoints, anchoring them in the text.

## **Conclusions**

The goal of this lesson is to understand the characteristics and construction principles for sermonic conclusions. The reason is that this is the high point of the sermon. This is what we have been driving at. This is the final exhortation, to say, “All that I have been saying is to have you hear this response that God is calling for you to achieve or to follow because of what we have talked about in this text.” Here are three basic guiding principles for why conclusions are so important.

First, the last lasts longest. What you say last, particularly in an oral medium, lasts longest in people’s minds, memories, and impressions, so it is so important because we know that is what people are going to hear echoing as they leave. As a result, we also recognize that the last punches hardest. What is said last, assuming it is said well, is what actually carries the greatest impression of the overall sermon. Now why is that intimidating to us? Because, you know, all of Saturday I have been working on this sermon, and about one o’clock in the morning I was getting to the conclusion. So when I am most tired, I am trying to say the thing that will actually have the greatest import. This should help us to say, “Now what are my priorities here?” Typically, those who teach preaching encourage people that the conclusion is the most important thing. It carries the biggest punch.

So it needs to be produced with some care, and therefore the last guideline is the last comes first. You read about this in your readings, and you recognize that this is an old debate among homileticians. When do you prepare the conclusion relative to the rest of the sermon? Now if you are presenting the sermon, you know that the conclusion comes last, but when you are preparing the sermon, there are some dangers in preparing the conclusion last. I have already mentioned to you one of them: you are just tired. You are now very tired, and you are trying to do the most important aspect of the message. Another problem with waiting to write the conclusion until after you have written everything else is that you might suggest something new. In fact, if you did not know what your destination was, how did you even choose the words and the terms and the exegesis to spotlight as you were working through the sermon? It is like driving a car without having a destination. If you do not know where you are going, then how did you even decide what route to pick, what words to choose, or what exegesis to concentrate on? That is one danger. What is another danger of writing your conclusion before you have done all the other preparation of the sermon? There is a reverse danger. What is the danger of saying, “This is what I am going to talk about,” before you have written everything else? You might impose something on the text that is not there. You might create a sermon that is moving toward something before you have really thought through what the text means. You know that, even as you are writing, the Holy Spirit works in your heart and mind to direct you as you are going, but you may be deaf, as it were, to what the Spirit and the Word are saying to you because you are going to your destination. Now how do we put these two things together? If there are dangers on both sides, what do we do? I would say it this way: you create the target, but you hold it loosely. It is very important to have a fairly clear idea of your destination before you write the rest of the sermon. If you do not know where you are going, at least in general terms, there could be all kinds of word choices—in terms of knowing how to state your main points and your subpoints and what applications to use—that will be very difficult to make if you do not know what your

destination is. However, I think you want to be willing to change your destination if the Spirit and the Word are directing you elsewhere. So it is important to have a fairly clear idea of where you are going.

We will talk a little later about what I call the “left-field rule.” You know that you are out in left field when you are doing a sermon and you get toward the end and you say, “Hmmm, I wonder how I should apply this.” When you say that, you know that you have missed the point. What were you doing all that exposition about if you did not know what the application was? If you do not know what the conclusion is and where you are going, then what was that other stuff even about? So holding it loosely, but having a general idea of where you are going because you have studied the passage enough, will guide you to the conclusion.

When we do application, I will say it this way: application should come at the end of sermon research. You do not want to be doing application before you have researched the material, so application comes at the end of sermon research, but it comes at the beginning of sermon writing. In other words, I have to know how I am putting this thing together. This principle is all the more important with conclusions. I should have researched what this passage is about before I came up with conclusions, but I should have a clear idea of the destination as I am doing all of the preparation for the presentation of that material.

As I said, this is an ongoing debate among those who teach preaching. Do you remember some of the authors who say that you should prepare the conclusion first? Broadus, the father of expository preaching, says to prepare the conclusion first. He is very much aware of the fact that you are so tired that you may not do it well. Rayburn says to prepare it first. Haddon Robinson, in his book on biblical preaching, says to prepare it first. It is interesting that Stott is the one who kind of breaks the pattern, and you will read that work next semester. John Stott is the one who says you should not prepare the conclusion until you have done everything else. I have said that you should do something in between preparing the conclusion at the beginning and saving it until the end, to be aware of the dangers of both sides. That is known as the “mealy-mouthed approach.” I think what you will find is that it is what you begin to do. If you do not have an idea of where you are going, you just feel adrift as you are preparing all the material. On the other hand, if you say, “No matter what I find out, I cannot change my conclusion,” then you will feel as if you are constrained from saying what the Spirit has been saying to you.

What are the components of conclusions? I will give the summary first and then we will go into the details. G. Campbell Morgan said it this way: “Every conclusion must conclude, include, and preclude.” It must conclude. It must end! It must stop the sermon from going on, so it must conclude. It must include. That is, it must include what has previously been said. That is summary. It is reminding people of what has been said. A conclusion must also preclude. That is, it must preclude the possibility that the listener will escape the message. It is giving not just a reminder but also the implications. This is what we will ultimately call the exhortation—“Now that you know, what is God calling you to do or believe? How should you respond?” The technical ways of saying these things are, first, recapitulation, or concise summary. The first component technically is called recapitulation. There should be some sort of concise summary, not extended explanations, but hammer-stroke statements that quickly reiterate the

central concepts of the message in order to make the final appeal for action. It is the fast marshalling of the sermon's forces using its key terms. It is very important that recapitulation use the key terms of the sermon.

Again, from where do the key terms of the sermon come? They are the key terms of the magnet clauses of the main points. What are two ways of presenting them in summary? We have already said that you can group them together, but another way that you can do it in the telling of a story is that you can thread the key terms throughout the story. You can group or thread. Grouping is putting them together in a summary statement. Threading is telling a story and having the key terms reappear in the telling of the story, to bring the mind and the ear back to an awareness of what things have been about. Let me just read to you from W. H. Sangster, who was a really wonderful pastor in England a century ago. Let me show you how he did it one time. I will tell you what his sermon was about, and then I want you to listen to his conclusion and how he threads so well. His sermon was about this: he was emphasizing that the believer has been purchased by Christ's blood. Therefore he no longer belongs to the world. He belongs to God. Do you hear it? The believer is purchased by Christ's blood, so he no longer belongs to the world. He belongs to God.

Sangster said this:

Some time ago, a poor drunkard committed his life to Christ in this church. Twenty years before that, he had actually been a pastor in a church nearby, but when he assumed a pastorate in this town, he took to drink and he ended up in the gutter. When he gave his life to Christ, he had a hope, though. When he truly believed he was purchased by Christ's blood, he believed that his thirst might be quenched by some stroke of omnipotence—that God would just take the thirst away. But that did not happen. There began the day that he was purchased by Christ a long guerilla warfare in his soul between the deadly craving and the keeping power of Christ. As his new friend, I suggested that on any day that he found his fight especially hard, that he would drop by the church and we would pray together. He dropped in often. His drawn face often told its own story, and we would go to the chapel and we would pray. One day as I was praying with him, he broke down completely. The contrast between his earlier life of holy service and the revolting bestiality to which his drunkenness had brought him was too much for him that day. He sobbed like a child and said, "I know I am in the gutter. I know it. But I do not belong there, do I? Tell me. Tell me I do not belong there." I put my arm around him. I felt a great elation even in the embarrassment of his tears. He had lost his way, but Christ had not lost him. "No," I said quite positively. "Christ purchased you by His blood, and you do not belong to this world. You belong to Him." This is the same hope that God offers you, each of you here, and that you must claim. You do not belong to the world. You belong to God. Believe it, and live it.

Do you hear the key terms? It is really beautifully done, and at the same time there is a charge to our hearts: you must believe this. You must claim this. That is what a conclusion does. It marshals the forces of the sermon by saying, "Here are the thoughts we have discussed. Here is what this Scripture has said today. Believe it. Act on it."



Exhortation is the next key component of conclusions. Sometimes this is simply called final application. We do not summarize simply to summarize but to marshal the forces for the appeal that we will make either to belief or action. We are saying, “What concrete personal actions are you calling for from the hearer? What do you want me to do?” Now that “to do” may be behavioral or attitudinal. It is not always about behavior; it may be something to believe as well. It typically includes some direction. Show me precisely what you expect of me now at the end of the sermon. We will spell it out. We will do it briefly. The final exhortation is not long. It is usually just one or two sentences. Here is an example. A mere summary of a message would be to say something like this: “Today we have seen that God is sovereign, and He is holy, and He is loving.” That is just summary. You hear those key terms. He is sovereign, He is holy, and He is loving. That becomes exhortation when you say something like this: “Because God is sovereign and holy and loving, we can trust Him. Even in times of our greatest difficulty, He will never lose control, and He will never stop caring, and He will never lose hold on you. Fear not, whatever you face, for you have a God who is sovereign and holy and loving.” The exhortation began with the imperative “fear not.” Here it is just an imperative of attitude, but I have told you what to do with this information. You are to apply it in some way to your lives in that final exhortation.

The next key component of conclusions is elevation. There is some sense of climax. Here thought and emotion are arriving at their greatest height. If you are not moved in the conclusion, it is unlikely that anybody else will be. Even your tonality should express that there is a sense of urgency in the conclusion. It is not flat. Now it does not mean that it is always said with great bombast, nor is it always said with very low tones. You are saying what, according to your personality and the content of the message, would mean the most to you, and you are saying it as though it does. Manner and content must now conform to one another. Say what you are saying as though it has the meaning to you that you are trying to communicate.

There are two ways we typically do this. One is by using a human interest account that is poignant. I will just be very straight with you. Those of you who are training to preach sermons in this culture, you recognize that for men in this culture it is somewhat difficult to express emotion. In your conclusion, you are trying to be somewhat emotive. Here is where *pathos* is coming to help drive, as it were, the *ethos* and the *logos*—what this means now. But that is hard for us, and so it is typically very important in a sermon and a conclusion to identify those human interest accounts that have their own *pathos* and that can poignantly drive home to the will and to the heart, as well as to the mind, what we have said logically in the message.

If you do not do a human interest account, there really is only one other basic type of conclusion. We went through about seven types of introductions, but there are really only about two types of conclusions. One is a human interest account. The other is what is called “grand style.” Grand style does not depend on the story to carry the emotive *pathos*. It depends on your manner to do it. So it is heightened words and heightened manner that says, “This is very important. Listen to me. You must walk away with this truth.” You are not telling a story, but the words that you choose and the way that you express them expresses the urgency of the moment. So that is called grand style, and having those two in mind will typically help you through. Now I will tell you if you are not used to a lot of public presentation, grand style may feel awkward to you, but telling

a story about people who are dear or important to you will not be awkward at all. You will feel the power of that, and it will not be strange to you, so most of you probably will choose to do human interest accounts when you start out. But grand style becomes an option that is very important as well, and typically even when we are telling a poignant story, if it has touched us, there will be elements of it that are touched with a certain amount of *pathos* as well.

The last part of what is involved in conclusions is termination—that is, they have a purposed, pointed, definite end. What do you want people to walk away with? That is what you want to end with, to have a fair amount of purpose to it. The marks of effective conclusions, when we pull these things together, are first, uniqueness. How many conclusions are there in a sermon? A good sermon has only one. Did you ever go to a sermon and you thought the preacher was done and then suddenly he took off again? The best conclusions arrive in emotion and termination at the same time, so they are unique. There is only one conclusion. Obviously, conclusions have climax. We have talked about the emotive intensity of a message. Remember this is the highest emotive intensity of the message. Conclusions have resolution. We began the introduction saying, “What is the burden of the message?” That is the fallen condition focus (FCF), the burden of the message. That appears in the introduction. The conclusion tells people that we have dealt with what we identified as the burden. The Word of God has dealt with the burden that we identified, so we are bringing resolution by showing how the burden is being dealt with. Another mark of effective conclusions is finality—that is, they arrive on time and do not wander off. Again, Sangster is so good here. He says it this way: “Having come to the end, stop! Do not cruise about looking for a place to land like some weary swimmer coming into the beach and splashing about until he can find a way out. Come right in. Land at once. Finish what you have said and end at the same time.” Now then, this is a good pastoral qualification: “If the last phrase can have some quality of crisp memorable-ness, all the better, but do not delay even looking for it.” It is great if you can end very well, but it is still better to end than to wander about looking for a better way to end. An idea of finality will help. All of these things, of course, tell us that conclusions need careful preparation. They are the most telling thing. They have these basic components, but very soon you will find that people will not remember—though we cannot fail to do it, for reasons we will see shortly—they will not remember much of the meat of the message. They will remember telling conclusions. They really will, and it will become very powerful, so these have to be prepared with a great deal of care.

Let me give you some cautions for conclusions. As you hear their components, you will already recognize some of these. One caution for conclusions is to avoid consistent emotionalism. Once you begin to recognize that the conclusion is the place for *pathos*, it can be a place for manipulation. You know that; they know that; everyone knows that. Are you still being authentic? I had the sadness in some measure of being in a pulpit where there had been a man, a pastor or two prior to me, who had been in that church for 50 years. That was great. The difficulty was that over the last 15 years of his life, he cried in every sermon. Now I was there some 15 or 20 years after that, and the people still laughed about it. In every sermon he was that kind of weeping pastor, and it was, in their minds, manipulative. Now what makes it authentic is what is in your heart. It was said of Moody that he was one of the few people who could legitimately talk about hell, because he truly wept that people would go there. Something was authentic in the way that he preached that people knew that he really cared. He did not weep

every time, but when he did weep, it was genuine. Somehow we want, again, for manner and content to come together. Sometimes that means that in the conclusion we will speak with what almost sounds like great anger: “This *must* change!” Other times we will speak with great tenderness: “This must change, or we will be deeply, deeply hurt.” Manner and content must come together, but somehow that manner has to be reflective of what we are saying. So consistent emotionalism is a problem, but absent emotions is also a problem.

The second major caution is this: do not trail off. You will find that your heart thumps and your breath goes and you perspire and all those things that are just part of being in front of people. When you are doing it for 30 minutes or more, I recognize that what will happen is that you will become tired. It is an exercise. It is tiring. Typically, when I preach, by the time I am done, my back is soaked with sweat. That is almost always the case. It is an exercise. You are taking in a lot of breath to project adequately. You are gesturing. You are thinking hard and working hard, and your body is also into what you are saying, so when that begins to happen, there is the tendency simply to be tired at the end and to begin to say all poignant things very quietly. Everything gets whispered and put up in a high register, and the message has the sense of winding down, but you are saying the most important things, so there should be almost an electricity in the conclusion. Again, I am not talking about bombast and volume every time. That sometimes is appropriate, but there should be a sense of “this is the most important thing” and that you are speaking in a way so that you are not trailing off.

The next caution is just a hint for those of you trained in other modes of public speaking. Ordinarily, there is no final “thank you.” We do not say, “And therefore God says that this gossip must stop, and it must stop in this church. Thank you very much.” We do not say, “thank you.” We do preach sermons in the style of a public address, but we do not say, “thank you,” at the end of sermons. Now what about saying amen? It depends a little on the generation and even the church in which you are preaching. It sounds strange for a young man in churches today to say, “And this is what you must do. Amen.” It almost sounds as though you are congratulating yourself. Now there are churches, I recognize, where the “amen,” means something like, “This is what God has said, and I am saying it with great confidence to you because I have spoken with the authority of the Word of God.” However, even if you were doing that, I do not know that I would do that every time, so I would be cautious about the “amen” that seems like a self-benediction as opposed to, “I really had to say this today.”

Another caution is that you should let the conclusion conclude. Sometimes you may have the thought, “Well, I do not really have to come up with a good conclusion, because we are going to sing that great song afterward.” Or you might think, “I will just think of something to say in the final prayer.” Did you ever hear the final prayer and know that what the preacher was really doing was saying the third main point that he forgot in the sermon? Now if you have to do it, you have to do it, but it is not the way to plan. We sometimes will know that there are things we want to drive home with the concluding prayer or the song, but it is usually not a good idea to plan for those to carry the sermon, so we let the conclusion conclude.

I want you to avoid using rhetorical questions as concluding sentences. Please do not make the last sentence of your conclusion a question. For example, someone might say, “And so what we

have just seen is that the disciples followed Jesus. And what does God call you to do?" Often rhetorical questions come because the preacher could not think of what he wanted people to do, so he asked a question instead. Now technically, there are things that are called maieutic questions, which are questions that are directive, but we will not do that yet.

Use poems and quotations with great caution. We really are not the generation that appreciates very much "three points and a poem." It is not that you would never do it, but I am cautioning you that today people will almost grimace when sermons end that way. If you do end with somebody else's quotation or poem, please use it only if that person says exactly what you mean, not almost what you mean. Recognize that the change of voice and meter and language if you are using an ancient poem or an ancient quotation will actually tend to throw people off. We are not a very patient generation for language we do not understand, so if, right here at the conclusion where you are trying to drive things home, you begin to use archaic language, then the very time you want to say the most important things, people just stop listening. Prepare the audience for what you are intending to do with the quote. We have said that before. If you are going to use a quotation, please tell them what to listen to. Try not to break eye contact. Now just think of that. I have gotten to the point of this message, where I am saying, "This is the most important thing; I want you to hear me," and then I start to read to people. I break eye contact and look down. That is probably not what you want to do. The main question you have to think about is "Do you really want to give the last word of this sermon to someone else?" This is someone who has not lived among these people. They do not know the congregation. Do you really want to give the last word to someone else? Now if it is a very controversial point, maybe you do, but most of the time I would caution you against simply borrowing from another time, unless, again, that person says it so much better and it really will make a stronger impact than you yourself will make.

Here is a very important caution: do not introduce new exposition in the conclusion. It is very easy to say, "Now of course we know this is true because this is a present tense verb." The conclusion is the wrong time to be starting with new definitions, new exegesis, new references to other biblical texts. It is the wrong time to be doing that. It is not wrong to do, but it should not be done in the conclusion. The conclusion should conclude, not start something new.

Finally, avoid the word "finally." That was in your readings, but let us talk a little about that so that it is clear. If you say, "in conclusion," what does every third person in the church automatically do? They look at their watches. You just created what a homiletician would call "linear consciousness." You put time in front of them when you say "finally" or "in conclusion." Now, I will grant you that if the people have given up all hope that this sermon is ever going to end, then saying "finally" will cause them to brighten. If you have to say it, you have to. It can be a technique, but you should be aware that if you do not have to, you may be creating dynamics you do not intend. This was in your readings, but I just love the quotation from R. E. O. White, when he said it this way, "'Finally, brethren,' can be said by an apostle, and he can keep going for two more chapters, but you should not." A troubled English pastor once asked a farm laborer why he came to church only when the assistant preached. "Well, sir," said the farmer, "Young Mr. Smith says 'lastly,' and he does conclude. You say 'lastly,' and you last." If you do say, "in conclusion," then it should mean you are concluding.

Here are some hints for effective conclusions. How do we do this well? First, use a human interest-account if you can. Not only will it tie up the sermon in terms of emotion and poignancy, but people will strongly identify with these human-interest accounts. So it is just a very strong way of having people identify as well as hear the importance of what you are saying. I will just say quickly again that the other form of conclusion is called grand style, but if you can, human-interest accounts typically are the strongest.

Here is just a hint. Put the illustration of the last main point high in that point so that it is not competing with the conclusion. If the illustration comes too late in the third main point and the conclusion is a human-interest account, then you create anticlimax. You are actually taking away from the climax by having the story in the last main point too close to the story in the conclusion. You remember that we have said these pieces do not have to come in one particular order. The third main point is usually a point where it is helpful to move the illustration as high as possible, so if you have two subpoints, you might put the illustration after the first subpoint so that you create separation from the illustration of the conclusion. Again, these are just hints. These are not rules, but they are thoughts to consider. Think about whether you want to create anticlimax or whether you want the concluding illustration to have a real power of its own because it is not too close to other stories.

We have already talked about recognizing the power of ending with a telling phrase. If you can, it is important to end with a telling phrase. Now again, I am not saying that you would always do this. Does anybody know what the last words are in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount? You will know them immediately when you hear them. They are "fell with a great crash." Here are the last few sentences of the Sermon on the Mount: "Whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house upon the rock, and the rains came, and the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, but the house on the rock stood firm. Whoever hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand, and the rains came and the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and that house fell down with a great crash." That is the end of the Sermon on the Mount. So you see that these are not new ideas. These are just the ways people think and take in information in an oral medium, and so we see what that means even for Christ's time.

We have already talked about the importance of ending where you began. It is something we would not use every time, but a wraparound conclusion is often powerful. We end where we began; we finish the telling of the story. It is called a wraparound, so to end where you began can be a helpful hint.

Finally, a last thought for conclusions is to try to end with a positive. After all, it is the Gospel. It is the good news. Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount with the great crash because it is the last rendering of the Law, and He has showed people that they cannot live up to this. After that, His ministry is about the answer to the great crash, but we know that ministry, so it is not a good idea to end our sermons by saying something like, "And if you do not do what I say, you are all going to be in trouble, and this church is going to be ruined. Let us pray." We are preaching the good news, and I think to take the impact of the Gospel and make that your hope and encouragement

to people is the greater strength of the sermon.

Someone might ask how we can end with the Gospel if the text does not mention Christ or His redemptive work. We will spend a whole semester talking about that, but the key right now is to say that context is part of text. The context is part of the text, so identifying how this text functions in its redemptive context is important. What I said about the Sermon on the Mount is that it is the last rendering of the Law. If I put it in its context, I can begin to see how it functions redemptively. So that is not eisegesis. That is identifying where a text fits redemptively. Now we will not fully answer this question today. This question is addressed in the last half of *Christ-Centered Preaching* that we will not even read this semester. So we have a lot still to do, but it is good to feel the weight of that question. Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing,” so if all our message has been moral imperatives, we have a problem. We have to put the text in its context, and that will always be a redemptive context.

Let me just make sure this gets in front of you before we end. Here is some conclusion on conclusions. You need concise summary. It may be threaded or grouped. It may be both, but you need to have some sort of concise summary in which the key terms of the magnet clauses of the main points appear in the conclusion. You need some form of climax. Is there a sense of emotional intensity? You need final exhortation. Are you telling me now what to do or believe or hope in? Is there an exhortation that is part of the conclusion? Typically it is the last two sentences or so. That is typically where that final exhortation occurs. You need a definite end. Did this seem to have some sort of professional design to it? Did it definitely end and make us ready for that end? You need something that will neither surprise nor seem to wander off.

## **Classification of Messages**

We have talked about technical things for a while, and I want to back away and think philosophically with you for a little bit. Think about some things with me for a while. Let us talk about what our preaching involves and how it can help people. Certain images come to mind if you think of the biblical images for what a preacher is and what a preacher does. What is a preacher biblically? In the Bible, a preacher looks like a shepherd or a watchman. We see the image of the farmer who goes out to his field to sow. An orator or a herald gives the good news or the warning. An equipper has words that enable others to do the work of ministry. A preacher is also seen as a captain of an army, one in charge of others, a teacher, or a servant. They are ambassadors for Christ as though God were making His appeal through us. There are other quite different images: a carrier of a live coal, one who sets fires, one who eats a scroll. A preacher is given something to eat that is taken in and is bitter. In that case the prophet gave a message of judgment to God's people. You eat the scroll so that you will say what has to be said even though it is bitter to your own stomach. That is a very interesting picture. Another image is of a stick, like Moses had. Moses' stick carried forward the authority and power of God. The staff that Moses took represented the authority of God in his hand, and it would occasionally speak what Moses needed to say by what it represented. We could multiply these images several times. I want you to think about them because of the questions we are going to discuss in this lesson. We should begin to see how diversified the biblical perception of preaching is. We should also see how sermons vary so that we can be well equipped for every preaching task.

Let us talk about the appropriateness of language. I can remember when I was a student here and Dr. Laird Harris, who is now the emeritus professor of Old Testament, spoke in chapel. He told us that his wife was dying of cancer. He said in his sermon, "Whatever my God ordains is right." I will never forget the way he said it. It was so tender and powerful at the same time. It was appropriate for his situation and for the content of what he was saying. Some of you have heard of Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was a long-time pastor of Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia. I listened to a sermon that he once preached against liberalism. This was a particular line in there: "They obscure the vast truth of the Scripture with their scrawny minds and their silly, finite thought, unaware of their pride." That was not very tender! But he had a right to speak that way. I can remember a famous Scottish preacher named Martin Allen. I will always remember the end of his sermon where he simply said, "What I want you to know more than anything else: the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." There was an electricity in how he said it. It was not tender, it was not bombastic or bold, but it seemed so appropriate for what he was saying. I want you to think about that appropriate language as you look at the various words in Scripture that are used for preaching.

There are many words associated with preaching throughout the Scriptures. Some of these we have already looked at: *parash*, *sekel*, *biyn*. There are various verbs to talk about what we are doing when we preach. *Parash* means to distinguish or be specific. It possibly means "to translate" in the Nehemiah passage. *Sekel* is to give the sense or meaning. *Biyn* means "to cause to understand" or "to separate out for use." That is somewhat different from the nouns that are

used, which often reflect the manner in which the message is being presented. *Nabiy* conveys the idea of “one who pours forth or announces under divine impulse.” You get the idea of someone pouring out the sermon or pouring out the truth. *Chozeh* is “one who glows or grows warm.” You have heard it said, “The preacher really warmed to his message today.” *Ra’ah* is “one who sees, particularly with special insight.” *Qoheleth* is “a caller or one who calls out.” The verbs that occur (*qara’*, *basar*, and *nataph*) become various forms of expression. *Qara’* means “to call out.” *Basar* means “to announce glad tidings.” The equivalent New Testament word of this is *euaggelizo*. *Nataph* simply means “to drip.” That is an interesting concept of what preaching might be: to drip words on people.

The New Testament words are *kerusso*, which means “to sing out or herald the Good News.” *Euaggelizo* means “to announce joyful news.” Those first two are often used with reference to the unchurched people. You find words that are more technical for those who are churchd. We looked at these before: *diermeneuo* and *dianoigo*. These convey the idea of unfolding or opening up meaning. *Dialegomai* means “to reason, discuss, or converse.” Paul reasoned in the synagogue that Jesus was the Christ. This has various other forms of explanation that are attached to preaching, like *paratithemi*, *logos*, or *rhema*. Other proclaiming words are *diaggello* and *kataggello*. There is a whole new category of proclaiming with great boldness with these: *parrhesiazomai*, *elegcho* and *epitimaio*. These are strong words; they even take the notion of rebuking. The next two are very different: *parakaleo* and *paramuthia*. We often associate paraclete with *parakaleo* when we refer to the Holy Spirit. He is the comforter and encourager. *Paramuthia* similarly means “to give comfort, cheer, or consolation.” *Epitimaio* means “rebuke”; *paramuthia* means “to give encouragement.” These are somewhat different than *martureo*, which simply means “to give a witness.” *Homologeio* means “to say the same thing, to agree with.” It is to agree with what the Scriptures say or to carry that message along. This is somewhat similar to *homileo*, which gives us our word homiletics. Curiously, it means “to converse, to talk with.” *Laleo* means to speak. *Didasko* and *epiluisis* are teaching words. *Apologia* is a word that means “to defend the truth.” *Metadidomi* means “to share.” Sometimes the Scriptures talk about sharing, to give across, and to share what I have with you.

The reason I want you to think about those various words is because preaching sometimes gets presented as only one thing. Earlier in this course I asked you, “When you think of preaching, what voice do you hear in your ear?” You may have a reflection of a circumstance or person who encapsulates “preaching.” I want you to begin to think of the richness and variety of expression of preaching. The Lord is filling up our tool bags with the vast wealth of the way as well as the content of what Scripture addresses. He says it is all for us to use. Paul says at times to Timothy that he should “rebuke with great authority” those who oppose. Other times he will say to encourage those who are downtrodden. Which is the right thing to do? That is the wrong question. They are both right.

Let us think about the voice we use in preaching. Preaching does not always sound like Mr. Rogers, nor does it always sound like Jonathan Edwards. But how do you make choices, and how do you decide what voice to talk in? Your voice will be governed as you consider your listeners. You need to think about what their circumstances are and what they are dealing with.



Are they in rebellion right now or are they in grief? You also need to consider the message itself, particularly what the text is saying. The text itself may be very tender or very strong. You need to be faithful to the meaning of the text. Who you are and what you are like will also determine your voice. If you are going to say this in a way that conveys deep meaning for you, it will have to be reflective of your own personality. Consider how God made you. If a person like you were to express this deeply, what would it sound like? Finally, you need to consider the situation and circumstances around you. All of those things need to be taken into account as you preach.

In addition to our voice, we will make choices of the type of sermon that we use. In this course we are building expository messages as a foundation. But we have never said that is the only type of sermon. Let me give you a quick list of other types of sermons. The first other type are topical messages. The key feature of a topical message is that it gets only its topic from the text, not its developmental features. The subject is divided and treated according to its nature rather than the text's nature. For instance, "Today I want to talk about the history of our church as it deals with charismatic gifts." That material is not going to be in the text. There may be biblical information that deals with it, but the nature of the topic governs what I am saying in that case. "What does the world say is the cause of poverty? What does the Bible say is the cause of poverty?" Part of that will come from the text. Part of it may have to come from secular sources. The types of subjects that lend themselves to topical treatment are things like moral or societal ills. Chief doctrines or practices of the church are built on many texts. If I want to explain to you my church's view of infant baptism, I probably am not going to go to one text. I feel like I will have to support that through a number of texts. It will probably be a topical message built from different sources—more than one text. Topical messages are often an essay approach. The danger of a topical message is that it might become a lecture. The chief problem is that opinion may rule rather than the text.

Another form of messages is textual messages. The key feature of a textual message is that it gets its topic and its main points from the text. The subpoints are not from the text, though. Development will be from elsewhere. Textual messages have an advantage over topical messages in that they can be very topical but appear more anchored in Scripture. You can at least get the main ideas out of the text, if not the development. The types of subjects that lend themselves to this treatment are passages that relate subjects in distinct but undeveloped form. "All this is of the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. This is of the world and not of God." This talks about materialism, sensualism, and egotism. I may develop this in other places, though. I may go through the life of David and show where materialism led to sensualism, which led to egotism. That passage out of the New Testament does not really explain altogether what those terms mean in the passage. It assumes you know what the terms mean from other places. You have distinctions that are not developed. That might lead to a textual message. The danger of this type of message is that you might do a lot of ice-berg. You might begin importing ideas on the text that are not there. It is another form of opinion ruling.

In this course, we are going to do expository messages. They have the distinction of getting their topic, main points, and subpoints from the text. You can substantiate further a subpoint from other texts, but first you show the ideas from the main text. That locks us down and makes sure

that we say what this text says. That is the chief characteristic of this type of sermon. It keeps answering the question, "What does this text say?" The advantage of expository messages is that people can see where you get the information. That means you develop the biblical education of the people to whom you speak. They see it in the text. If you do consecutive preaching, you are forced to deal with subjects you might not naturally deal with yourself. Opinion no longer rules; the text rules. The text sets the agenda more than my opinion. If the text sets the agenda, not only do I have subjects that I might not think of, but I also have authority that I might not have personally. "This is what God says." I can say that authoritatively at times about very sensitive subjects because it is not my authority. It may not even be my agenda. If I just roll through the text, I may be able to talk about very sensitive subjects without pointing the finger at people.

So with expository preaching you have greater variety and greater authority. You develop an educated congregation. The Bible sets the agenda and gives you the authority that you need. The danger of expository preaching is that it is boring for many in this culture. Many people today do not connect with expository preaching, particularly its stereotype. We said exposition includes explanation, illustration, and application. Even for people in the church at times, expository sermons are caricatured as having no illustration or application. It is just information thrown at them. In this course, we want to keep the pieces together. We want to speak with the authority of God's Word. We want to speak about subjects more than just what is in our brains and what our interests are. We want to let God's Word set the agenda. Even as we let God's Word set the agenda, we want to make sure that I still exegese the people as well as the text. I need to speak to their necessities and their capacities. It is not just enough to speak to the necessities. How do I speak well enough so that they can hear and hear what they need to hear?

You have heard all of those aspects of what God allows you to do. You can be a herald, an encourager, or a rebuker. One of the old ideas is that a preacher was a physician of souls. The physician sometimes says, "You either take your blood pressure medicine or you will die and leave your children fatherless." He or she can be very bold. On the other hand, a physician of souls might say, "We cannot fix it here. The Lord can, but we cannot. Whatever happens, you are in His hands." When you are a physician of souls, you are one who gives the diagnosis of the people as well as the text. You speak God's truth for their care in the voice necessary for that time. God gives you that right and that authority.

## **Explanation**

Let us review the distinguishing features of topical, textual, and expository sermons. A topical sermon only gets its topic from a text. Until you do it, it will not make quite so much sense. The topic is developed according to its nature rather than the text's nature. Let us say I want to do a topical sermon on gambling. My first major point might be about the history of gambling in our culture. That will not come out of the text, so I will develop the subject according to its nature rather than the text's nature. The text may mention something about being caught up in the materialism of the world, but it is not talking about the history of gambling in the United States. A topical message gets its topic from the text, but it develops the topic according to its nature rather than the text's nature. It could be a doctrinal subject. You may want to talk about the nature of predestination as it is found in the Old and New Testaments. You would develop it according to the way in which it is developed across those testaments. You probably will not develop it according to one text. That is a topical message.

A textual message gets its topic and main points from the text. This is a message in which you would get the idea from the text and even the divisions of the idea. These are the things of the world: the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. These things are of the world and not of God. Those things are not developed in the text, but they are major divisions. If I talk about the lust of the flesh, I might say, "In the life of David this took this shape." David is not discussed in the New Testament in that text, but I develop the text according to other texts. I get the main divisions out of this text, but its developmental features come from other places. That is a textual message. I do not want to give you the idea that either topical or textual messages are wrong. They are just not foundational things in what we are developing. In the history of preaching, both topical and textual messages have a rich history.

Finally, expository messages get their proposition, main points, and subpoints from the text. In the expositors' ethic, let me tell you what this text says. I am forced to deal with this text. The main points and subpoints come out of this text. A key point of qualification is that you can go to other texts for further proof or development. But you have to show what is in the main text first before you go to another one.

The multiple scriptural terms tell us there is more than one right style or attitude with which to preach. Some scriptural terms that describe preaching are quite strong, like *epitimaō*, which means "rebuke strongly." Or there is the notion of *paramuthia*, which means "to give comfort." All of those are different scriptural understandings. We went through many of those in the last lesson.

Then we talked about some basic advantages of expository preaching. You could multiply these many times, but the ones that were mentioned in class are good ones. Authority is one reason for expository messages. You say what the text says. The expositor's ethic mimics Augustine. When the Bible speaks, God speaks. If I clearly say what the Bible says, I speak with the authority of God. Expository preaching also helps with variety. It forces you to preach through a text with its ideas more than your own. It can avoid getting into your favorite subjects, and it can avoid your opinion ruling. There is authority and variety. There is also disciplined Bible learning for the congregation as well as the preacher. I am forced to look at the text and ask, "How do I know what this means?" I have to work through a text on its own terms so that the Bible is developed clearly in my understanding. I become better able to look at it. Those were basic thoughts that we talked about in the last lesson.

I encourage you to look back over the material out of Broadus. He talked about advantages of expository preaching. He said this method better corresponds with the very idea and design of preaching, which is

to explain the text. Expository preaching does that with the authority of the text. He also says it is the ancient and primitive method.

We questioned that a little bit, saying it is the ancient and primitive ethic to make sure we say what the text says. In terms of the method of expository preaching, it is seen very little in the history of preaching prior to Broadus. Most of what you saw prior to Broadus was topical or textual preaching. It was not expository. Broadus gave us a methodology for expository preaching against the German liberalism that was creeping into North America. Expository preaching ensures a better knowledge of the Scriptures on the part of the preacher, the hearers, and the Scriptures in their connection. It causes sermons to contain more of pure Scripture truths and Scripture modes of doing things. Opinion is not ruling. Broadus' writing was primarily post civil war. He died prior to the twentieth century. His primary writing was in the 1850s with it hitting its stride in the 1870s. Broadus' multiple volumes and editions continued to be the most used homiletics throughout the twentieth century. It took many different editions. The final ones, which would have been to his great shame later on, were taken over by liberals. The later editions have very little reflection of the ethic that he tried to establish. Even here for years we used what was called the Witherspoon Edition. If you are in bookstores and look for a legitimate edition of Broadus, the Witherspoon edition is the classic edition that took Broadus at its best and melted it down.

So expository preaching gives occasion for remarking on many passages of the Bible that otherwise might never enter into one's sermons. It allows you to give important practical hints and admonitions that might seem to some hearers offensively personal if introduced into a topical discussion. They are here naturally suggested by the passage in hand. That is a lot of words, but it is wonderful pastoral wisdom. Broadus says that you can admonish people without seeming to point your finger at them. You are just preaching the text! Last week you were in chapter 1, this week you are in chapter 2. It just came up! You seem to address things that might be patently offensive if you have just picked it this week instead of if you were moving through the text. You can deal with very touchy subjects in a way that is not so personally offensive. It still has the authority that you need.

Finally, expository preaching greatly diminishes the temptation to misinterpret texts by excessive allegorizing or accommodation. Allegorizing is where you impose on the text what is not there. You may begin to spiritualize or say, "This means something," that you cannot prove this text means. The way that usually happens is imposing something from the New Testament on an Old Testament text. You do not take the text on its own terms, but it is icegeesis. You bring something in that is not really there. It is somewhere in the Bible; it is just not what this text says. Expository preaching forces us to deal with the text on its own terms.

That was what we talked about last time. Let us pray, and we will move forward for this time.

*Father, thank You for Your goodness to us. Equip us this day, we pray, to learn what You intend for us for Your Word. Father, as we return here next time, we will be on top of our national elections. We are reminded to pray for those in authority over us. We remember a chief justice who has just been struck with cancer. We remember a president who will be chosen this next week who will be responsible for choosing new chief justices. There are many issues of life and justice that will be determined by the president and his choices for Supreme Court judge in the next few years. Father, would You, therefore, guide our nation. We know that righteousness exalts a nation. We pray that the one whom You would bring and allow this country to elect would be one who would honor Your Word. And we pray that there would be people more and more gathered around him as well who would reflect the principles of the Bible in the way in which justice affects this nation. Father, each of us probably has our preferences, but our greatest preference as men and women of God is that You would do what You know is best, for then*

*we would be most blessed. Help us, Father, even if it is a time of great hardship that would turn us back to You to depend on You. Help us not to look to our circumstances to determine Your goodness but rather to look to the cross. There, Father, is the character of our God revealed. We trust you for eternal things and ask your blessing in these temporal things. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

The goal for today's lesson is to understand the basic nature and process of the explanation component of sermonic exposition. We have been creating a homiletic taxonomy as we have been going. We now have a lot of the pieces together. The Scripture introduction has the contextualization and creation of longing (C and C). Creation of longing is the harder of the two for us to do. Everybody gets contextualization: give me a little background on the text. But to say why you need to read something and go into it is the harder part to explain in terms of its importance, even as we introduce the text. Sometimes in contextualization you slice out the text. You say, "This narrative goes on for 78 verses, but we are not going to read the whole thing! Instead we are going to summarize a little bit, read a little bit, summarize a little bit more, and read a little bit more." We will tell people what we are doing and why we are doing it in the Scripture introduction. We will alert them that we will do some summarizing and paraphrasing, and usually you will read the key portions significant for the sermon itself. The other thing you can do when you slice out the text is say, "This is a very complicated text, and it has two major issues going on in it. Next week we will deal with the second issue. This week we will deal with this issue." That way everyone does not come to you at the door afterward and ask why you did not deal with the whole passage. You can remind them that you told them you would deal with the other topic next week. You can sometimes narrow your purpose in the Scripture intro by saying what you will deal with this week even though you know there is more there. So there is Scripture reading and an introduction that has various components in it. That leads to the proposition, which is made up of principle and application. Then you have the main points, which have their components: explanation, illustration, application. All of this leads to a conclusion.

In this lesson, we will look at what comes after the subpoint statement, still within the explanatory component. In essence, we will talk about what happens in the paragraph under the subpoint statement. Every subpoint is roughly a paragraph of explanation, so we will talk about what goes into the meat of the little bones there. The explanation component is the material that goes in. The explanation component answers the basic question, "What does this text mean?" We try to both do and avoid certain things. Stott says, "To expound the text is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view." The opposite of exposition is imposition, which is to impose on the text what is not there. If you do not understand the meaning of the text, you can impose on the text a meaning that is not there. You might impose inadequate understanding on the text. You might import information from your experience, from other texts, or from what someone else told you. In some ways it is twisting Scripture. Imposition is also to choose a text based on what you want to talk about. The text may refer to that topic in some way, but as you look at it, your opinion rather than the text rules. So experience, opinion, or ignorance may rule. Finally, other texts may rule in that you may not say what the text itself says.

We make sure we are on the right track when we think about the explanation's purpose. The explanation's purpose can be broken down into two categories. There is a theological purpose for explanation, and there is a homiletical purpose. The theological purpose of explanation is to confront the people of God with the meaning of God's Word. Homiletically, explanation has more explicit purposes. You should try to amplify, explain, or prove the main point or the subpoint that you just stated. It is pretty straight forward, except sometimes the tendency when you form subpoints is to form something that does not support the main point. We talked about a stool where we put the legs somewhere else. This material may have lots of good information in it, but it does not directly support the subpoint or main point statement.

Let us define explanation. Generally, explanation answers the question, “What does this text mean?” More particularly, explanation acts as the proof of the main point or subpoint statement and the warrant for its application. It is not either/or; it does not only explain what the text says. We always have this ethic behind us. My goal as a preacher is not just to data dump. I am not just a minister of information. I am a minister of transformation. As I bring all this information forward, I try to say how, with this information, I can exhort you to do what the Word of God requires. It has an end, *telos*, or purpose behind it. Proper explanation always, therefore, keeps in mind something that happened very early in the introduction. It is the fallen condition focus (FCF). As I deal with explanation, I should always come back and make sure I deal with the burden of the sermon. It is not just a data dump. I should not just give you information of some sort. The main points deal with the FCF, the subpoints support the main point, and the information that supports the subpoints takes us back to some exhortation that deals with the FCF.

In expository preaching, you make two proofs. First, you try to show that the text actually says what you just said. The second proof is also as important. It is to say, “As a result, I can tell you to do something about it.” You do both things. You say what the text means, and you tell people to do something about it. You have the proof and authority of the text to do that. Where people get into trouble, particularly when they start preaching, is that they only think of the first side. They only try to prove what the text means. “This text really does support predestination.” On the basis of that, you should urge them to do something. That has to come from the text and be part of the explanation as well. Explanation is not merely the transmission of information. It is the conscious establishment for the biblical basis for the action or belief the sermon requires of God’s people.

Jerry Vines has a good way of summarizing this. He says, “Some have understood an expository sermon to be a lifeless, meaningless, pointless recounting of a Bible story.” That is a knock on expository preaching! A preacher might say, “Let me give you a few thoughts on this text.” They give information on the text, but they do not say what it has to do with those who are listening. That is often the caricature of expository preaching. Vine says, “I can still remember a very fine man deliver such a sermon from John 10. He told us all the particular details of a sheepfold in ancient Israel. We were given the complete explanation of the characteristics of sheep; we were informed about the methods of an oriental shepherd. When the message ended, though, we were still on the shepherd fields of ancient Israel. We knew absolutely nothing about what John 10 had to say to the needs of our lives today. This is not expository preaching.” Expository preaching proves that the text means what you just said. And because of what you just said, you can prove with the authority of the Word that you must respond in a certain way. The explanation always has in mind both aspects of that. When we first think of what expository preaching is, we think of ourselves getting all our organization, exegesis, historical literary information, and even illustrations together. We try to move a great stone of explanation by getting information into peoples’ minds. But expository preaching, even according to Broadus, is actually something else. It tries to get the application into peoples’ hearts. The old line says, “We are not ministers of information; we are ministers of transformation.” I gather the explanation, organize it, do the exegesis, and prepare the delivery. Everything I do is on the fulcrum of exposition in order to do application. This explanation component, the meat of the sermon, is not just for information transfer. It moves an idea to the listeners of what God requires of them. That is the scary part of preaching. You do not just tell them what they need to know, but you tell them what God requires of them.

In an expository sermon, subpoint statements must be taken from the expository unit. Explanatory material following the subpoint statement can refer to other passages, though. The subpoint statement has to come from the text. I have to be able to show that something I say is in the text. As I begin to

support that statement, there is going to be some material in the text that supports it. But there may also be material from other texts that further supports it. That is legitimate. To be truly expository, I have to show the idea originates in the text. I did not just create it. To support that idea, there must be something in the text that supports it. But I can corroborate and build the case further by using other texts as well. I cannot, however, say, "Let us look at James to see what justification means in Paul's letter to the Romans." You cannot do that because they mean different things and use different words. To try to say what Paul means exclusively by going to James will mess you up. You can start with Paul and further it with Paul. You can say, "Not only do we see Paul saying it here, but we know, by what he said in the next chapter, even more." You can expand your expository unit. You might even have to say, "James uses the word 'justification' a bit differently. Do not get confused here. You may go to James and think that is not what it means. I want you to know that I know what James says, and he uses the word differently." You may actually refer to James within this material to show that that is what Paul does not mean. It is part of the explanation. It is something that can confuse people at points. We have talked about this several times, and I have said it at least once in each of the last three lessons. I want you to feel that expositor's ethic. You have to tell what this text means. To run over to other texts to do that breaks that ethic. In fact, it leads you astray. It is hermeneutically not sufficiently powerful to let me prove to you what the text says by going other places. In fact, I can make the text say anything I want by doing that. I want to take the text on its own authority. I can prove support in other places, but I need to at least start here to show the apostle or prophet's argument on his own terms. That way I do not twist Scripture.

Let me make some important notes. Explanation causes exposition. When I explain, I unfold the text and open up its meaning. Explanation forms the outline point structure of expository sermons. We talked about this early on. When we talk about subpoints, going back to our double helix, we talk about explanation. The illustration is not a subpoint. The application is not a subpoint. We will see in the lessons ahead that the subpoint's language actually goes into the illustration and application. You have to support and develop the subpoints before you get into the illustration and application. Subpoints are the instruments by which you form illustration and application. After all, you are going to apply what you proved was in the text. You have to prove it is there so that you can apply it. We will develop that as we go. This is a reminder that the skeleton or bones of the sermon is the explanation component.

There are three stages by which we prepare explanation. If you are in InterVarsity (IV) training, this will be very familiar to you. The three stages are observation, interrogation, and restatement. Observation says, "What is in the text?" Interrogation says, "What does it mean, and how do I know that?" Restatement says, "Now that I know what it means, how do I best communicate it to others?" For the next several minutes, we will take those pieces and begin to explore them. We will talk about their further implications.

Under observation, the best way to identify what is here is obviously to read the text. I have actually had the awful experience of standing in the pulpit, reading the text, and saying, "Uh oh! I have not prepared to deal with this!" I had begun to focus on a narrow part of the text that I wanted to talk about. Then when I was forced to read the text completely and all together, suddenly I was aware that I had not dealt with all that was there. As simple and easy as this sounds, the way in which we identify what is here is by reading the text. We absorb its particulars, we try to get captured by its thought, and we try to have it control us rather than vice versa. Spurgeon's famous quote is this: "Get saturated with the Gospel. I always find I preach best when I can manage to lie asoak in my text. I like to get a text and find out its meanings and bearings and so on. Then, after I have bathed in it, I delight to lie down in it and let it soak into me." I do not think it is a very pleasant image to think of Spurgeon sitting in a tub! But I love the notion of being a sponge and letting the Scripture just soak into you. That happens primarily as we just

let it come. Read, reread, and read again. Do I really understand what that text says, and am I letting it control me? The second aspect of observation beyond reading the text is to identify the text's features. As we read, we try to ask what is here by asking what words are being repeated. What does that name mean? Do I know what the destination or city is? Observation often makes use of the five W's and the H. They are who, what, when, where, why, and how.

The next piece is interrogation. Once we identify what is here, we ask what it means. In particular, we involve these subsidiary questions such as "How do I know it means that? How can I communicate it to others?" I am about to give you five major forms of explanation that fill up this meat under these bones of subpoints. These are types of things that we do in these paragraphs under the subpoints. The first way that we show what the text means is by plain statement of the text. In other words, I may say, "What does it mean when Jesus says, 'Pray and do not give up?' It means to pray and not give up!" This is plain statement of the text. If plain statement of the text is the way that I explain the text, then the form of explanation is simply repetition. If plain statement of the text makes it plain, then mere repetition of the text is what actually goes under the subpoint. It may be a paraphrase of the text, but it merely repeats it. Restatement of what the text says works about 80% of the time to explain the text. It is strange, but it works. There are other things to do in the remaining 20% of the time. But a lot of the time, the shortest distance between two points (what you know and what they can know) is simply to repeat what the text says. Point out that portion of the text that will support that subpoint statement.

The second major thing that happens in explanation to make clear that your subpoint is in the text is to point to contextual features. We explain the context of the text. My rubric is "Context is part of text." Sometimes people wonder if they can mention what is around the text. Of course they can. If Paul is in prison, it will explain a lot of what he says and how he says it. If we are in the Passover service, your knowing what the different cups mean explains what Jesus is doing as He distributes the elements for the Lord's Supper. There are two forms context features: literary context and historical context. For literary context, you might talk about the genre. It could be poetry or a Proverb. If it is a Proverb, it is not a promise. You could also point out surrounding verses or chapters. There may be author commentary, something the author says in a preceding chapter that bears on this. Or how does God Himself comment in other places on this? The other main form of context is historical context. What are the events, the people, and the ethnography? One of the famous books that deals with the New Testament is *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* by Alfred Edersheim. For a generation, it told people what they did not know about the life and times of Jesus. It explained what they were talking about when the disciples went through the fields and husked it in their hands. He talked about how wheat, not corn, in our explanation, is actually what they were doing. They would take the husk off and eat the kernels. If you did not have Edersheim to help explain what was going on, it might not make sense. Understanding the life and times of the people is part of the historical context.

What everybody expects the explanatory component to be is the third major component, which is exegesis. The material that goes under the subpoint is your exegetical insight. What exegetical insight proves that subpoint statement? I have five possibilities of how we do exegesis. There could be many more, but these are ones that we do over and over again.

The first form of exegesis that is very common is definition. We may give a definition of what that original language term meant, often in our contemporary terms. Sometimes we give a definition in theological explanation. How does propitiation differ from expiation? Propitiation is a substitute to turn away wrath whereas expiation turns aside wrath. These are only slightly different, but it is a very important nuanced difference that people may need to know between key biblical terms. So you may need to give a definition.



Grammatical insights are another form of exegesis. You can give the tense, gender, case, mode, and modifiers of a word. In Luke, Jesus says to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, “The reason we know that there is a resurrection is that God said to Moses, ‘I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’” That is Jesus’ own proof for the resurrection. The tense proves the resurrection. It is present tense. “I (still) am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Jesus actually uses an exegetical argument of the present tense to prove the resurrection. It may be important for you to know that in Galatians 5 the language is singular when it says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, loving kindness...” You often hear people say in common language, “the fruits of the Spirit.” They say it as plural. But when you make it plural, you can create a sort of excuse for yourself. “The reason I am not kind is because I do not have that spiritual fruit. I have the spiritual fruit of patience, but I do not have the spiritual fruit of kindness.” In saying that, you have made different fruits. But Paul in Galatians says it is all one fruit. Those who have the Spirit display all of these things. It is not this or that; you have all of these characteristics. You cannot dodge and say you will take one and not another. In that example, you simply say it is plural or singular. That is an exegetical insight that allows you to make some exhortation based on it.

The third exegetical tool is comparison passage usage. You can look at various places and ask how it is used elsewhere. You could say, “Paul actually uses this word only once” or “Paul uses this word 13 times in the book of Philippians.” The frequency of a word or the way it is used in other places sometimes gives us insight.

The fourth form of exegesis is to use comparison translations. You hear pastors do this all the time. “The New International Version (NIV) says it this way, but the English Standard Version (ESV) adds this richness.” It is not wise to say, “The NIV really messed up here.” When you speak that way to people it can create doubt about the Bible. People do not normally think about the translation that they look at as a translation of the Word of God. They think, “This is the Word of God, but what did the preacher just say? He said it is messed up. So it must be messed up in other places. How do I know where else it is messed up?” That is one problem that can happen. It also comes across as arrogance when we say that the translators messed up. The Bible is messed up, and I am arrogant. Is not this a wonderful pastoral approach? There is a way to compare translations to actually help people have further trust in the Bible and further appreciate you. You can tell them that the translations differ, but there is something good about that. You can say, “This translation expands our understanding. We gain a richer understanding by... We even learn more by looking at...” There are many positive ways to look at it instead of simply saying, “They are wrong.” Then you can feed people’s need and desire to know more.

The last aspect of exegesis is structural or linguistic patterns. We looked at this in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus indicates His change of subject by saying, “You have heard it said, but I say unto you... You have heard it said that a man who commits adultery sins, but I say to you that a man who even looks at a woman with lust in his heart has already committed adultery.” This is the last major giving of the Law, and it is the highest reading of the Law. Jesus not only says what behavior is wrong, but He notes what in your heart is wrong as well. That too is going to be judged by God. We often take the Sermon on the Mount out of context when we read it as the perfect law of God for the kingdom and say, “Therefore go do it.” The Sermon on the Mount was the highest and perfect law of the kingdom. Jesus gave it so early so that you would know that you cannot do it. Therefore you must turn to someone other than you. You must now look to His ministry. It is all the right moral instruction. But if all we have done is stopped right there, we have not presented the text in its context. What was its intention? What was Jesus doing as He gave this last and highest reading of the Law in terms of pointing to the ultimate purposes of redemption? There are other linguistic patterns. We know that Hebrew poetry sometimes follows acrostics. Hebrew poetry does not rhyme; it uses parallelism. If you want to know what one

phrase says, look at the one ahead of it. It typically will say it a slightly different way. If you do not understand what this phrase says, look just before or after it. There will usually be some parallelism that reflects the meaning of that phrase. It may be a contradictory meaning or a furthered meaning. Poetry always functions in tandem statements of chiasmic structure. Knowing that may be part of your explanation.

Another form of interrogation in explaining is expert witness. So far we have plain statement of the text, context features, exegesis, and now expert witness. There are two forms of witness: human commentary and divine commentary. Human commentary explains what the text means by quoting Calvin, Hendrickson, or some other human commentator. Divine commentary shows what God explains a passage to mean. For instance, God explains Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 2. We know that *alma* in Isaiah 7:14 means virgin versus young maiden because of Matthew. There may be divine commentary that looks at other texts.

Last, there may be logical proof in explanation. I may simply use logic to prove what I mean to say. There are infinite variations of logical proof. Let me give three basic ones: cause and effect, evidential proof, and necessary implication. You could say, "The Bible itself says the Gospel is true in terms of Christ's resurrection because so many people witnessed to it and the church grew so fast." Paul himself in 1 Corinthians says, "This is how you know the resurrection is true. People you still know say it happened." That is logical cause and effect that is explained. There may be evidential proof. Some of you may remember Romans 8:26 from last time. Many people say that the groanings that are mentioned in Romans 8 are ecstatic tongues. But the groanings are used three times. Two times they refer to "The whole creation groans as in the pains of childbirth, waiting for its redemption and the redemption of our bodies." The groanings are not described as ecstatic language; they are described as the crying out pains of childbirth. It is unlikely that when you talk about the Spirit speaking for us with groanings too deep to utter that it is talking about ecstatic language. The very word has been used twice already to talk about screaming, great pain, and not ecstatic language, within the same passage. Another form of logical proof is necessary implication. The reason you know this means something is it is a necessary implication out of the text. I say that you must be born again before you can believe. Much of our culture says you must believe in order to be born again. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Until he is born again and the Spirit is at work in him, he cannot see the things necessary to believe. Being born again, regeneration, has to precede justification, rather than the other way around. Justification does not lead to being born again. You cannot believe in order to be born again.

You could multiply those things many times. I just wanted to give you some basic tools and examples. When you look at sermons, and when you begin to see these subpoints and the paragraphs of material under them, you will see these things. You will see telling context, repeating the text itself, giving some exegesis, giving historical background, and giving logical proof. That is the material that goes into that meat of the paragraph under the subpoint statement. Subpoint statements summarize it, and this is the material that supports the subpoint. A lot of this is common sense, and this is where we do these things in the sermon. Typically under the subpoints is where a lot of the information that you learn in seminary is put.

Sometimes you get divine commentary in the New Testament that comments on the Old Testament. You end up preaching on both texts, but that is not a bad thing to do. For the expository unit, you may actually declare both texts to be your expository unit. I did a sermon about two weeks ago in which I preached from Numbers. I very much needed 1 Corinthians to comment on that. I wanted both to be my text. I said, "Paul says this means this, so when I read this, I want you to see Paul's direct commentary."

That is not icegenesis because I am still using the authority of God to say what the text means. “Here Paul specifically says that Christ is the Rock.” I want to know how the rock is reflected in Paul’s writing, so I use both texts. I might start in Numbers and later on say that we understand how Paul addresses this. That is a little different than on my authority using a text to explain a text where the Bible itself does not bring the two together. Where the Bible has made a reflection at times, you might feel that you cannot explain it without bringing in both texts. You will need them both in order to do what the Bible says.

There could be an overlapping of different types of explanation. For instance, the context of Psalm 119 is a sevenfold repetition of the Hebrew alphabet. That is its context, and at the same time it is part of its pattern too. The idea of the Law of God being perfect is repeated in two different places, so in the second place, part of the context is what has already occurred. It is also part of the pattern of what occurs. There could be, in many of these things, an infolding of the different distinctions. I do not think you can differentiate entirely between exegesis and pattern. There will be categories that implode in those things.

Realize that you cannot do all the forms of exposition in any one main point. That would be a long sermon. We had the preaching lessons last week, and it was even in the Westminster Directory of Worship that Stephen Phillips actually wrote of preaching, “Do not feel that you have to prosecute every doctrine of the text.” You do not have to use every method. How do you know which method to use if you have all these alternatives by which to make something clear? Use what is the most efficient to make the text plain and to prove what you need to prove. It may be determined by the nature of the audience or the nature of the text. My goal is to be as efficient as possible. Once I have proven it, I need to move on and not keep using other methods. I need to use the one that is most effective and so forth.

Let us go onto restatement, which is the last aspect of how to best communicate the meaning. There are three points here: organize, crystallize, and memorable-ize. To organize, you seek to sequence and subordinate. We sequence so that we can cover the territory. Have I covered all the verses? You will not cover them all equally. You make prudential choices about what needs to be addressed, but you still need to make sure that you have covered the territory. To subordinate, you prioritize. What really needs to be addressed at greater length, and what does not really need a lot of explanation? Let me tell you about one of my favorite cartoons on preaching. This is what you should try not to do. The pastor says, “Verse 33 is one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the whole Bible, so let us go to verse 34!” That is when you know you have not covered the territory. It is tempting at times, because there are things that you know you will not have time to cover or those things will be hard to talk about. So you want to just move on. When you cover the territory, it is particularly with respect to problem aspects. You know you need to spend more time on verses that will cause people to get hung up. Particularly with regard to problem aspects, we cover the territory by how we organize. Crystallizing is trying to be as efficient as possible. We crystallize our material. We divide what is lengthy, and we group what is numerous. You may have read passages where there are lists of things. The fruit of the Spirit is one example. You might deal with the lost parables in Luke 15. You might think there are too many things for you to cover sequentially, so you may have to find ways to group things together. I may have to deal with the things that are lost and the things that are found in Luke 15. There are many things lost, but I may have to group them if I want to deal with the whole chapter. I could deal only with the things that are found later. It may be a two-point message, though I recognize there is a lot more sequence there.

When you identify your expository unit, you may have a verse that you know is particularly problematic and is going to distract from what you want to address in the sermon. Your Scripture intro is a place to say, “Folks, I know that verse 3, which talks about the unforgivable sin, is a very difficult passage. We are going to get to that next week. For now, this week, we are going to deal with the assurance that we

have in things that are clearly forgivable.” I have sliced out the text. I have said, “I know this is a problem, and we will deal with it later. Allow me at this point just to deal with these assurances that we have. We will come back to this another time.” You will get in trouble, though, if you never come back to it! They will say that you gave them a false read. You can slice out problematic parts, narrow your purpose, and be fine as long as you have clearly told people why you narrowed and how you will deal with the fact that you narrowed it.

After organize and crystallize, the third aspect of restatement is memorable-ize. This is a made-up word, but I made it up because it is one of the forms of putting things in memory. It is known as a neologism, to make it stick in some way. I did this by putting “izes” at the end of these three distinctions of restatement: organize, crystallize, and memorable-ize. When I use the word memorable-ize, it is an example of what I am trying to say. One of the things that is a mark of really great preachers is they love to communicate. They just love doing it. They love watching people’s lights go on. They love learning the tools that make things stick in people’s memory. We can organize beyond just academically saying what is in the text. We should want to make it stick with people a bit and make an impression. We are trying to find ways of making the outline stick in people’s memory. As we word main points and subpoints, so far you have concentrated on using key terms. We said to make parallel statements with key word changes. Over time, we will begin to learn ways of making those key words stand out. The classic way that you can make key words stand out is by using alliteration. The key words can start with the same consonant. A slight difference is assonance, where they start with the same vowel. The idea is that they start with the same letter. This particular outline I just gave to you did not start with the same sound, but it ended with the same sound. That is another way of making it stick. You could use strong graphical images. “Satan’s ways are a web. Satan’s ways are a trap. Satan’s ways are a cliff.” Strong graphical expression is another way of trying to make things memorable. Eventually you will get beyond feeling like you have to use the very words of the text when you make your outline. You will begin to realize you are obligated to the truth of the text. Many times the words of the text will help you do that. I will say something and tell people to look at the text. They will look down and see those same words. That is great. Other times you actually want to use new words, not necessarily created words, to make the truth stand out in people’s minds. Then I can support it with the material of the text. Great communicators sometimes have to group concepts together or break things apart. Always they try to figure out how to make it stick in your mind. That calls on us not only to be academic but also creative. This is where preaching starts to take on an artistic form as well. How can I really make this stick in a way that actually gives me some joy to see lights going on when you hear it?

Having talked about creativity, let us talk about simple things that go on when we explain concepts. There are two steps of explanation’s progress. We have said that there is a subpoint and material that comes under it. If you were to actually break this down, here is what happens. You state what the text means, and the material under that shows how you know it. Even though we have gone through all of this material of different forms of exegesis and context, we are really only stating what the text means and showing how we know it. That is what happens in a sermon. That is the progress of the thought. Here is the way that we actually present it. There are three stages of explanation presentation in the typical main point or subpoint. First, we state the truth, and then we place the truth. You will hear the preacher say something like, “Look with me in verse 2. It says...” I state the subpoint statement, and then I place the truth. Look in the text where that is. If it is a context feature, I will say, “The way we know this is because Paul was in jail.” I place him in jail. I place where I got the knowledge. State the truth, place the truth, and prove the truth. State, place, prove.

In academic training, the most difficult of these to do is to place the truth. We usually forget to do this. We state a truth, and then we start running off with our explanation of doctrine. We just start rolling

instead of saying where the text says the truth. As you prepare your sermons, highlight in your notes that that is the most common trip. People will state something that is true somewhere in the Bible, and they will begin to explain it, but they will have never shown where it is. "Look with me in verse 2; right in the middle of the verse it says..." To place it is the very thing people are hanging on the edge of their seats to have you do. They all say at the end of the sermon, "Where was that in the text?" State the truth, then place it. When you do that you put such high hermeneutical observations on yourself that you almost cannot help but to speak with authority. "Here is what I said. There is where the text says it. Now I will prove to you the text says that." Once you have placed it in the text, you have very high authority for the things that you say.

Sometimes the subpoint answers the question why. My main point may have an analytical question, which is a "why" question. The main point might say, "We can trust God. Why should we trust God?" The subpoint may say, "First, He knows what is going to happen." We will still say, "Look at verse 2, where it says that." I will still answer the question and show where in the text that answer is. Then I will prove that the answer is there.

You are not just elaborating on the main point. You support or prove that the main point exists within the text material. It is a little rubric, but if you get it, it almost makes preaching easy: state, place, prove. Already this semester, you have probably thought, "I never really thought of sermons being explanation, illustration, and application." But once you learned it, you listen to sermons and hear that pattern. In the same way, once you hear this pattern, you will hear it in sermons over and over again. "My pastor does that! He states something is true, points to the texts, says where it is, and then he proves it." Once you see that you may think, "I can do this! Now I see how this is going." It is not just a long essay. It is an essay that proves what the text says in its particular places. State the truth, place the truth, prove the truth becomes a very standard pattern. After we have done those things, we will also illustrate and apply the truth. In a classical order, we state, place, and prove the truth, then we will illustrate it and apply it. We will vary this some later.

Let me make some small reiterations for us. First, in your sermons, the anchor clause is established just before or after the proposition, possibly early in the first main point. When you do main points, you know that the subpoints are about the developmental clause or magnet clause. The anchor clause is developed just before or after the proposition or early in the first main point. It is the foundation of all that follows. If it takes you five paragraphs to prove the anchor clause, it should not be the anchor clause. There is too much material behind it. The anchor clause is usually something pretty obvious and plain from the text. It is the foundation for the rest of the things that you will explain. Second, the developmental clause becomes the magnet clause. It is the side that changes for the remaining exposition. The exposition within the main points focuses on the developmental phrase's distinctives. The developmental phrase acts as the magnet attracting the exposition. The subpoints are about the magnet clause. Third, lengthy explanation is developed with subpoints that support or prove the magnet statement of the main point. If your explanation has gone on for two paragraphs, you still need subpoints. The ear needs it even though your eye does not think so. It is a strange thing. That is the difference between an essay and a sermon. Your eye will say, "That is easy to read. I can go through that." The ear typically will need road signs through that material. If you have a main point without subpoints and you have a long paragraph of explanation under that main point, you are all right. But if you have two or three paragraphs, you need subpoints. Main points do not have to have subpoints. But if you have one subpoint, you have to have at least one more. If you only had one subpoint, it should have been the main point.

If you have an interrogative subpoint, it should be worded in parallel with the other question subpoints.

The answers should also be worded in parallel. This is because the real subpoint is the answer. When you say, “state, place, prove,” you are really placing not the question but the answer. “Here is where the answer is in the text.” The thing that we will see very shortly is that it is the answer that will be developed in the illustration and the applications. That is why the answers need to be in parallel. They actually hold the concept that is most key. It will then go into the illustration. When you do bullet subpoints, it will be plain to you because everything will be parallel except the keyword change. When you do interrogatives, it might not be as clear to you. That is why the answers need to be in parallel as well as the questions. The answers hold the key terms that will go into illustration and application. If you preach regularly, turn the anchor clause into a question. “God is sovereign, therefore we should trust Him with today. God is sovereign, therefore we should trust Him with tomorrow.” What is another implication of God being sovereign? We will do this next semester. We will take the anchor clause and turn it into a transitional question. Then you will feel the flow works better. It will also shorten down that main point. We will not do that yet, though. We will get our habits down, and then we will start varying in many ways.

## **Why to Illustrate**

Let us begin by reviewing. Three stages of preparing explanation are observation, interrogation, and restatement. In preparing the explanation, those are stages that we typically go through. Observation says what is here. Interrogation says what it means. Restatement is how you can best communicate it. That is somewhat different from the three stages of presenting explanation in a typical main point. As you actually present that material, you state, place, and prove. Hopefully you have started to hear pastors do this. Usually the placement gets forgotten. We state a truth and then we begin explaining things out of a text or our doctrinal background, but we do not show the listener where it is in the text. State, place, prove is the presentation pattern that is very familiar. We have said this several times before, but you owe no more to explanation than what is necessary to make the point clear. And you owe no less to explanation than what is necessary to prove the point. That is where pastoral prudence takes over again. It might be clear, but you need to make sure you have proven your point. You may still need to prove it. But if you have proven it and it is clear, then move on. Typically we take the easiest course rather than the most difficult course in the proof category. Let us pray before we move forward.

*Heavenly Father, we, on this day, remember that righteousness exalts a nation. We remember that those who turn their eyes to You are those who are led to their security. So we as a people, Father, continue to pray for Your will to rule, that those who are in authority over us would be those who rule with justice and biblical righteousness. We pray, Father, that if there are those who are, by Your will, ruling over us with whom we disagree that nonetheless we would count the privileges of being a people who can elect their leaders. Even if we cannot elect our leaders, we are still the people of God who believe that You sit on Your throne and rule over the affairs of people so that Your will is done. May we be the people who trust Your way. Grant us to see eternally, Father, what You are doing. It is a plan beyond our own, a hand beyond our own, and a God who rules for the purposes of Jesus Christ. We pray, Father, knowing that sometimes the Word is spread in times of persecution better than it is in times of ease. We do not know what the day holds tomorrow, but we know that You know. In that we take great confidence. We ask, Father, for You to give us the faith that is necessary to be the citizens and the people of God that You require for Christ's glory. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.*

We will talk about illustration in this lesson. Let us return to our sermon skeleton and think of the taxonomy of where we are. We looked at the introductory material into the body of the sermon. So far we have the Scripture introduction, the Scripture reading, the introduction itself, and the proposition. Then as we begin thinking about main points, we recognize they have their own skeletal structure. There is explanation, illustration, and application in this double helix form you now know very well. The explanation has its own structure. Typically if it is longer than a paragraph it has subpoints. As always is the case, by doing subpoints and conclusions you learn far more about them. When you work on subpoints and conclusions for the first time, you almost always make mistakes. One reason is because not just the statements of main points are parallel but also the answers to the questions are worded in parallel. It is a common mistake to not put your answers in parallel. Often times the things you remember best later are those that you messed up the first time. If you made a mistake on parallel subpoint statements you probably will not do it again! You will say, "Three times I was told that the answers are to be parallel." We place such an emphasis on this because the subpoint statements have key terms in them. Everything is worded in parallel, but something changes that draws the attention of the ear. The explanation is about the keyword changes. The illustration is also about the keyword changes. If you do not have subpoints worded in parallel, you do not have the tools to form the illustration. After all, the illustration illustrates the point. If the subpoints hold the main conceptual point and they do not have keywords, we do not know what the illustration is going to be about. The necessity of subpoints

worded in parallel statements is so that you will have the key terms. The ear pays attention and understands what you are talking about by the keyword changes. You automatically know that is what the illustration is going to be about. Your key terms of the subpoints give you the raw material that will be necessary to form the illustration.

In the history of preaching, almost every component of exposition is debated at times. The Huguenots did not like explanation. Many in Reformed circles do not like illustration. We know there are people who think it panders to the ignorant that we have to use illustrations. There are some, for good theological reasons, who think we should not have application. The *sola spiritus* people think that it should be the Spirit alone; you should not do application. I will try, in the first part of this lesson today, to give you some of the reasons why we do illustration. Why in the history of preaching has great preaching always included illustration?

I can remember when I was a student and we had academic lecturers who came here. I was invited to the president's residence after the academic lectures to meet and talk to the man who had lectured to us. I can still remember this Dutch man sitting in the breezeway smoking his cigar. As he blew the smoke into the air and the circles moved away, he was actually complaining. He talked about the state of preaching. He said, "You know, television has ruined us all. I will use illustrations, but how I hate it! Little tales for little minds." Being a student and very academically oriented, I nodded my head. That is right! Is it not a shame the way that television has ruined us all and we have to use illustrations?

At that time I was also pastoring a little church in the cornfields of Illinois. To my horror now, I remember some of what I did. Sometimes when I preached I would actually take my systematic theology notes into the pulpit with me. I would actually preach right out of my class lecture notes and think I was giving the people good, solid information. It probably was good, solid information. I can remember one particular time in which I preached out of Philippians 2. The key phrase there is where Christ emptied Himself. The word there is *kenoo*, and theologians throughout the centuries have made the point that when Christ emptied Himself of heavenly glory He still remained divine. That word "emptying" does not mean "giving away." It means "putting away" without in any way taking away the authority of Christ's glory. I can remember standing at the pulpit, banging away, and saying to these farm and miner folk, "The word is *kenoo*! *Kenoo*, the word is! It means that He is still God even though He put aside His glory." I am sure they said amen. A few weeks later I had a missionary come whose name was Paul London. Paul had been a missionary to Africa for many years before his wife's health brought him to New York City. In New York he still ministered to international Africans in the United States, but he had a lot of African experience. When he came and ministered to our church, he asked the congregation to turn to Philippians 2. I thought, "Oh no! I just did this two weeks ago. They are going to be so bored because I already explained it to them." As Paul London went through that *kenoo* passage, he said to the people,

The way I like to think about this is in this way: when my wife, Carolyn, and I were in Africa, we ministered in a part of Africa that was very, very dry. It was almost a desert region. People would dig wells, but they are not the kind of wells that you think about where you lower a bucket into a well. Actually they sink deep shafts into the ground. The water actually condenses on the sidewalls and seeps in in very small amounts. They do not put a bucket down there, but they send people down into the well to wipe the walls and sop up the floor with rags. Then they squeeze the water into buckets. You have to go down into the well. The way that they do that is these well shafts are very narrow, so they put slits on the sides and a man walks down into the well to get the water. One day in our village there was a man who went down into the well, but he only got a little way down and then fell. He broke his leg at the bottom of the well. Somebody



had to go down and get him. He was a big man though, and nobody was able to go get him. Nobody wanted to go down and help him out until the chief came. The chief at that time was the largest and strongest man in the tribe. He took off his robe and his headdress, and he put them aside and went down into the well. He picked up the other man and brought him back up. Now folks, I have a question for you: when the chief took off his headdress and his robe, did he stop being the chief? No, he did not. That is what Jesus did. He took of His heavenly glory, but He did not stop being divine.

At the end of the service I stood beside Paul London as the people left, and they shook his hand and mine. I can still remember them saying, “Why, Reverend London, that was the most wonderful sermon. I never understood that passage until today!” I thought to myself, “It is not just little tales for little minds. Even I understood it better. I understood it better!”

Something deeper than just clarification goes on in illustrations. Illustrations rightly used do something fundamental in uniting the intellect with experience so that our very will is affected according to the Word of God. The reason that good preachers in all times have used illustration is not so that they will just have little tales for little minds. It is not just so they will entertain or spoon-feed the ignorant. They know something more fundamental is going on, that when experience is hooked to the intellect, profound understanding occurs in a way that mere logical explanation falls short. As you think about illustrations, do not be concerned about all of the details of this lesson. Just catch the gist of it. When we get to the next lesson, I will really push you on the details.

Let us talk about why we illustrate. Why do we do this in the history of preaching and in our preaching today? Before we go into the reasons why, let us talk about why not. I want to cut off at the pass what I recognize to be legitimate objections.

Illustrations should not be used simply as a form of entertainment. We should not illustrate just to entertain. Some time ago we talked about that chart of what speech communicators call Sways-ability or persuasion. When speakers begin their speech with an anecdote just to humor us, we know that interest goes up very rapidly. Credibility goes down almost as rapidly, though. This happens particularly if it is not apparent that the story or anecdote related to the concept at hand. Sways-ability, or persuasion, falls if all we do is entertain and if people know that is all we do. The very thing we think we accomplish by taking people along with us so that we will be more persuasive actually backfires, and the opposite thing occurs. All we do is entertain. It is not just that our persuasion falls. The effect of the preaching itself is damaged. If people begin to think that good preaching is preaching that entertains, think what shallow expectations we have created. “If it is not entertaining, it is not good. If I do not find it funny, then it is not valuable.” Talk about miscommunicating what the Word of God is about. If the goal of our illustration is to entertain, we have seriously damaged ourselves, the Word of God, and the people who listen to it.

Second, illustrations should not be used simply to spoon-feed the ignorant. That is the condescending notion that they are too dumb to understand, so you have to illustrate. People are not too dumb to understand; they are just as smart as we are. They do not have our seminary lingo down, but they are just as smart as we are. We do not illustrate in order to dumb down a message. Something else needs to be going on. I do not illustrate because they are too dumb to understand, and neither do I illustrate because I am too dumb to do good explanation. Sometimes you might think, “I cannot explain this very well. My explanation is not logical or weighty enough. I will throw in an illustration because I cannot explain very well.” If you cannot explain something very well, the illustration will not help you. This is because the primary purpose of illustration is not to clarify. The primary purpose of illustration is to motivate. The

illustration can clarify, but that is not the primary purpose. Otherwise you will think, “That was very clear, therefore I do not need to illustrate.” It is actually the opposite. Once it is very clear, you still need illustration because the primary purpose of illustration is not to clarify but to motivate.

Some of you have had teacher training, and you know these different distinctions. When we do explanation, we primarily deal with the intellect. When I do explanation, I primarily deal with information that you need. This is so that the intellect can properly process information out of the text. My goal is not just to inform the intellect, though. My goal is to transform the will: application. I have explanation, and I move toward application, which is to transform the will. Between will and intellect is effect. The combination of intellect and my experience with that that needs change is effect. The effect is what illustration deals with. I try to point toward what transformation is needed, but I want to bring into experience that aspect of understanding that explanation has dealt with. Explanation deals with intellect, application deals with the will, and illustration deals with effect. Effect is the motivation factor that brings this truth to that aspect of life that the will addresses. That takes us to why we actually use illustration.

The first reason we use illustration is because of the way that we live and interact in our world. It has been said by many people that we live in the age of visual literacy. We are habituated to picture thinking. Consider some of the following statistics of what that means. Obviously these can be debated in different terms, but you will get the idea. The average adult parishioner, the average person whom you will talk to on a Sunday morning, will spend roughly 50 hours a year in church. They will spend 2000 hours a year in front of a television. People will debate that because they say that is the time the television is on in the home. It does not necessarily mean people watch it that much. It is almost visual wallpaper in many homes. It is just on all the time. It causes a habituation to picture thinking. It gets scarier when you think of young generations that are now coming up. The average high school graduate will have watched 15,000 hours of television at a minimum, but will only have spent 12,000 hours in school. So the average high school kid will spend more hours watching television than in school. By the time he graduates high school, he will only have spent 1100 hours in church. He spends 1100 hours in church, 12,000 hours in class, and over 15,000 hours watching television. He will have watched 350,000 commercials. Here is the one that scares me the most: the average preschooler in the United States will have watched more television before entering the first grade than she will have listened to her father in her lifetime. We are deeply affected by the pop culture around us. Even if we personally think we are not, there is no question the people to whom we speak are deeply and profoundly affected by the age in which we live. Then you might ask, “Are you saying that because we are habituated to picture thinking we are just going to capitulate to our culture? Is that what you are talking about? Are we to entertain because we are supposed to capitulate to the vices of the present culture?” Even though we talk about the way we live, I want you to think about the way of wonderful preachers in the past.

If you think about those who have preached in previous generations, I will ultimately contend that the reason we use illustrations is not just because of this age but because of the way the mind functions in every age. Think of this: in the Middle Ages, there was a group of documents that circulated among the monasteries. It was known as the *ars praedicandi*, the art of preaching. It was not *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* by John Broadus; it was not *Christ-Centered Preaching* or *Biblical Preaching* by Haddon Robinson. It was the *ars praedicandi*, which was the curriculum for preaching that circulated in the Middle Ages among the monasteries. Among the *ars praedicandi* were the documents known as the *exempla*. These were books of illustrations. It was not just White’s *10,000 Illustrations for Preachers Today* or Barnhouse’s *Illustrations* that you can get over in the library, but this goes as far back as the Middle Ages. In a pre-electronic media age, people who were preaching still collected illustrations and used them as fundamental to what preaching was in those days. This is true of good preaching in any

age. For instance, the most memorable sermon of Jonathan Edwards is “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” and the portion of the sermon that you remember is the spiders over the flame. Is it not interesting that Jonathan Edwards was not on the radio or television, yet he used profound illustrations on the American frontier that we still remember to this day? If you go all the way back to Christendom, the earliest preacher whom we are aware of, Golden Tongue or Golden Mouth, you will recognize that he was powerful in his use of illustrations. There is something more fundamental than pop culture going on in the way that we understand. Remember we said, “Intellect, affect, transform the will.” There is something that has to hook the will to the intellect. That typically, in the history of preaching, has been the use of illustration. Charles Spurgeon used illustrations, and he wrote a whole book on the use of illustrations. He was also in the pre-electronic era. The Westminster Divines, in the Directory for Public Worship, said illustrations that “delight the heart of the hearer” should be included in our sermons. Even the Westminster Divines, who were before media and before the age of the habituated-to-picture thinking, still talked about the use of illustration. That is because it is an old, old preacher’s rubric that the goal of the preacher is to turn the ear into the eye. I want to visualize what you talk about. It is really more than that: I want to experience what you talk about. The best preachers have always recognized that if they have only given you head knowledge, heart knowledge is still a long way away. So part of effective preaching is getting the listeners to experience what I talk about.

The reason for the effectiveness of illustrations has been discerned in more recent decades by the way that we learn. Most of you who have been in teacher training or education in recent years recognize that there is a revolution that is occurring in this country and throughout the Western world in understanding how we learn and incorporate information. Up until the twentieth century, the Cartesian Model ruled. “I think, therefore I am.” The intellect is the foundation of knowing. Then you had the French philosophers, people like Merleau-Ponty, who said, “I am, therefore I think.” They actually said, “I can.” I can be involved or experience something, and as a result of going through it I can actually think about it. If I have not gone through something, I cannot really think about it yet. You can recognize that this is a dangerous philosophy. Talk about subjectivism: if I do not go through it, it is not real. There is damage in that. Yet it rules much of the way in which education is going these days. We should recognize the danger of this kind of radical subjectivism. “If I do not experience it, it is not real.” At the same time there is power in saying, “When I experience something, I understand more.”

You have probably heard of Dale’s Cone of Experience, which came out of a study at Michigan State University. “We will retain 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, and 60% of what we do.” In some ways, that is true. If you read something and have not had any other action with it, do you retain less of it? Instinctively we say that it is not as powerful as if I read it and experienced it. In a weird way, that is what happens when you work on subpoints and conclusions for the first time. I want to tell you how profoundly this has affected your education experience and mine. Mine was the first generation in public schooling that decided it would go on “field trips.” Your grandparents did not go on field trips in their education. All this stuff from Michigan State University, Dale’s Cone of Experience, and the philosophers of the French schools who came to the United States, influenced us. They said that kids had to interact with what they were learning. You cannot just tell them about firefighters; you should take them to a fire station. Do not just tell them how bread is baked; take them to a bakery. A lot of you remember those field trips a lot more than you remember things you learned in the classroom. Instinctively you know that interaction somehow drives knowledge deeper. You also know, because of the generation that you are in, that people learn differently. It is the reason we are a little suspect of the notion that everybody needs to learn by experience. The late-night television will tell you, “Come to our truck driving school, and you will get hands-on experience.” At the same time you may be wondering if that is the only way people learn. Intuitively you know it is the only way some people learn. We will be talking to all kinds of people. One of the wonderful things that has happened

generationally through educational transfers is that almost everyone has become more understanding of different learning styles. We recognize that some of us learn very easily as linear thinkers: just read it, and you get it. We also know that some people have to have some hands-on experience. Some need to hear us say it rather than read it on their own. Some need to do an exercise in order to understand it more than if they had just read it. Preaching tries to reach all of these different people and learning styles. It uses the different tools that the history of preaching provides. It really is the way of giants of the past and the way we learn today.

Illustration is also the way we motivate. If my child says to me, “Dad, why should I save money?” I will tell him that at some point he will want to get a Christmas present for his mom and he will need some money to buy her something. In telling him that, I do not go into an economic lesson on the nature of savings and interest income accrual. Instead I tell him a story. I tried to motivate my child by pointing out the implications of his actions. I explain a principle by telling about an experience he will have as a consequence of involving or not involving that principle in his life.

Let me share some good illustrations to show how we feel the weight of illustration. The first is from a sermon that underscored the importance of every child of God having a role in God’s kingdom. That is the principle: every child of God has a role in God’s kingdom. I can state that as a principle, “No matter who you are, you have a role. Even if you think you are insignificant or just a child, you have a role in God’s kingdom.” But I want you to think of this illustration, not only in terms of what knowledge it communicates, but also in terms of what it does to the will at the same time. Think of this not just as clarification but also as motivation. Think of what the preacher does. As a reminder, the principle is that every child of God has a role in God’s kingdom.

Rising out of the swamps just north of Savannah, Georgia is an historic church named Jerusalem. Salzburg Lutherans built this church in the eighteenth century after being expelled from their Catholic homeland. General Oglethorpe offered free land to these Lutherans who would assume the role of screening Savannah from hostile Indians all around. The Salzburgers from Austria brought their faith to this new-found land and named their town New Ebenezer. The name harkened back to biblical images more solid than the bogs surrounding the town. The dangers of the land and the diseases of the swamp soon decimated these early Lutheran settlers. But no trial could deter them from setting up their community of faith. The few able-bodied men continued to climb scaffolds to hoist bricks up to form the massive walls of their church. Women molded and baked sandy clay. Children carried the materials, both to the women on the ground and the men on the scaffolds. To this day, if you go to New Ebenezer, you will see imbedded in the brick of the church the fingerprints of children. When you picture in your mind those little children transporting bricks to those sick or dying parents, your heart may still break. But I imagine those children would rather your heart soar. For the print of each child is a poignant reminder that God can even use little ones for His work as they endure in His purposes.

Ebenezer means “stone of my help.” They raised this town out of a swamp, and they called it “Rock of my help.” The preacher wanted to make his principle memorable. He could have just said, “Kids have a role in the kingdom.” But he did not just want you to feel the information; he wanted you to feel the impact of it on experience. Heart, mind, body, and all aspects of us are involved that way. The role of illustration is not just to clarify; it is supremely to motivate. It brings intellect to the will by dealing with effect. It is the way we motivate.

Beyond the way we motivate, illustrations are the way that Scripture teaches. There are accounts of people experiencing the truths of God. About 75% of the Bible is historical narrative. That is an amazing

teaching principle! We cannot say that stories do not have a place in teaching God's people. Seventy-five percent is not little tales for little minds. It is not just the composition of the Old Testament or the New that uses illustrations. Redemptive history unfolds through story, too, though there is a lot of law and proposition included. We typically think of redemptive history as the garden, the flood, Jacob's ladder, the Patriarchs, the kingship of David and the following kings, and Christ on the cross. These major images that signal the epos of biblical history also make up the flow of biblical truth. It could have just been a systematics manual. Do you ever get frustrated with God? "Why is it not just a systematics book, God? That would have been so much better. Why did you not just put it down as a book of doctrine?" The Bible is the way it is because of the genius of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit recognizes that if it had just been propositional statements, those propositions would change with the experience of subsequent people. We will always interpret propositions out of our experience. The Bible gives propositions, and it gives the experience of God's people in that proposition. That way the experience explains the proposition even as the proposition explains the experience. They lock each other down. It becomes transcendent truth because it is not governed by my experience of the proposition. It is governed by my seeing the experience of God's people. I live it through their experience, so now I know what the proposition means. I know what it means when God says, "You shall have no other gods before me." I see the people of Israel over and over again turning to other gods, and I see the consequence of that. I understand the proposition by living through in described detail the experience of the people of Israel. The experience locks down the meaning of the proposition. It further explains it and motivates us to do what the proposition says. The proposition is necessary.

That is where the modern philosophy is wrong. It says, "If I do not experience it, it is not true." The Bible says it is true, and here is the experience of God's people who show you and prove that truth. "Therefore there is no temptation taking you but such as is common." You now know this truth because of the experience of people like you. The more I studied modern hermeneutics, the more I thought, "God is really, really smart in the way that He put the Bible together!" On our own, we would have just put together a book of doctrine. We would have made a systematic theology book and not recognized that it would actually have lost people over time. Having the story with the proposition is what actually locks down meaning.

This is the way that Jesus speaks. There is a cartoon where a man echoes a lot of concerns about preaching. As he listens to a preacher preaching he says, "In my opinion, he needs to use fewer parables and more Scripture!" You may have heard that complaint before, and it may be valid sometimes. There is almost an evangelical instinct that if it is all story, we object because we feel that entertainment rather than preaching is going on. These are known as skyscraper sermons, which have a story on a story on a story.... You just want to keep me engaged so you just keep telling stories. This is more your concern for how you do as a public speaker than it is for communicating the truth of God. At the same time, we object to arrogance that says I will never connect this biblical information with your life. We have to "earth" heaven at times. That is always the goal of the preacher: to bring heaven and earth together. One of the things that happens in illustrations is we take the experience that people have and say how it relates. It says in Mark 4, "Without a parable, Jesus did not say anything to them." That is a remarkable pun if you think about it both ways. It could just mean that, without a parable, He did not say anything else. We keep proposition linked to parable. But in educational theory, it has another meaning. Without a parable, nothing was communicated; it did not come across. At the same time, Jesus used parable to keep things from coming across. Without a parable, He did not say anything to them, but when they were in private, He then explained it. This is biblical genius coming through. If it is just story without proposition, it also does not have meaning. If it is just proposition without story, it does not have transcendent meaning. What makes it have meaning is proposition that is transcendent and experience that links it to our world. As a result, transcendent truth comes into our world and has meaning for us as

the Scriptures intended.

One of the remarkable places that this is said is in the Gospel of John and the epistle of John as well. Merleau-Ponty, the various French philosophers, and most teacher education programs in this country in recent years have said that stories have power to engage people. But the way they work is with what is called “lived body detail.” It is as though I lived through the experience again in my body. That is what makes the effect occur. My mind and the abstract propositions are now lived through as though my body were in the experience of those propositions. That might be great abstract truth, but listen to how the apostle John uses it. This is what he says in John 1:14 and 18, “The glory of God who cannot be seen was revealed in the Son who made known the glory of the father [by bringing it out in narrative] by the way he lived among us.” This is aorist middle indicative of *exegeomai*, which some of you read A. T. Robertson to mean “to bring out in narrative.” That is an interesting concept. He brings it out in narrative by the way He lived among us. John says in his epistle, “That which was from the beginning [the Son removed from us], which we have now heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the word of life—for the life was manifested, and we have seen it and bear witness and show unto you that eternal which was with the Father and manifested unto us—that which we have seen and heard we declare unto you so that you may have fellowship with us because our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.” There is the glory of the Father, which is revealed in the Son. We know that glory of the Father because the Son lived among us in narratives in our lives. And the way that you know it is because we will communicate to you what we have seen, heard, and handled. Do you hear “lived body detail”? What we have seen, heard, and handled is the glory of the Son, which is of the Father. We have had fellowship with it. The way in which you will have fellowship with it is by us telling you what we have seen, heard, and handled.

The lived body detail communicated is what is ultimately going to communicate the abstract to our experience. A famous study done in the 1970s by a pair of researchers recognized the power of experience and began to ask how learning could occur when everybody could not have the same experience. Not everyone could go on field trips to the same place. They began to test something. They did not just have someone go through an experience, but they had that person fully describe that experience. They wanted to know how much of the experience could be known by the listener. Surprisingly, there was not a testable difference between what people actually experienced and an experience that was communicated to them as long as the experience was fully described. “Testable difference” is an interesting qualification because I still say that if you actually go through a scuba dive it is a little different than someone describing it to you fully. In terms of a “testable difference,” they said there is no testable difference between an experience that is lived through and one that is fully described. “That which we have seen, heard, and handled, we tell you about so that you will know the glory of the Father revealed in the Son.” Lived body detail.

## **How to Illustrate**

I want you to begin to think about how these truths move themselves into illustrations that we can do. Last time we talked about why illustrations are important. In this lesson, my goal is to explain how to do illustrations. We will talk about it generally at first. Next time we will get very specific and quite technical about how to do illustrations. It can get very technical, yet once you understand it, you can make illustrations work powerfully in your sermons.

First let us talk generally about how illustrations work and how we make them function in our sermons. The first thing we do is isolate an event and experience and associate it with the principle being related. There are a lot of ways this can occur, but let me relate it this way. When you write a sermon, the more that you can sharpen the principle the easier it will be to find illustrations dealing with it. If you say that you want to talk about something dealing with sin, you will not find an illustration. Your concept is too broad. It is when you really sharpen the hook of what exactly you are looking for that you will be able to catch in your own experience or in your readings those illustrations that are much more specific.

Let me give you an example. Some years ago now I was the academic dean here. I became aware that one of our very loved professors was going to leave. I knew it would be shattering to some students and even some faculty, and it was not something I could talk about because things were still unfolding. I was aware it was going to be very hard on some people that this very beloved professor was leaving. I wanted to teach in my own preaching and preparation for that moment how, in a time of ease and a time where God blesses, you should build strength for difficult times. You should not just let down but build strength in the easy time for the hard times that are sure to come. I thought about that message and went to preach in a church in South Carolina. When I was there, I was asked to stay in a family's home. The man happened to be an engineer for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) who was on loan to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The reason that this NASA engineer was on loan to the FAA is because the FAA was studying how to deal with a big problem at the time, which was wind sheers at the ends of airports. There was a period of time when planes would come into airports, and as they landed they might go through a thunderstorm that would knock them out of the air. There were a number of huge crises and tragedies that occurred as a result of wind sheers. So the FAA began to study how they could find wind sheers before they occurred and identify them at the ends of runways. That way they could warn planes about them before they landed. They were prepared to spend elaborate amounts of money to develop systems that could detect wind sheers. It never actually happened. The reason the equipment was never developed is because of the study of this particular engineer. He said originally he thought of a wind sheer as a piece of paper that pushed things down at the end of a runway. But as he began to study more and more the nature of wind sheers, he discovered that it did not work like that. A wind sheer is actually like wind coming out of a hose the way water comes out of a garden hose. If water comes hard out of a garden hose and hits the ground, it splashes back up. They discovered that pilots came into the airport and would hit the splash-up of wind first. These pilots tried to land, but the wind pushed them up as they came in. So they dropped their power and pushed down into the wind. Without realizing it, though, they were about to hit that big wind draft. At the very time they dropped power and pushed down, they should have added power to push through. So they started training their pilots to power up and push through if they came to the end of a runway and hit a big updraft in a thunderstorm. They saved pilots by training them to do that.

Remember that I was looking for an illustration that fit what was going on back at the seminary. When you are in the easy times, or the updraft times, do not power down. Use that as a time to power up for the difficult times that will surely come in life. It was because I knew precisely what I was looking for

that that illustration was so profound to my own experience, and I could relate it to what I wanted to talk about. I isolated an event and experience and associated it with the principle to be related. The more you refine the principle the easier it will be and more powerful it will be to find illustrations that deal with those principles.

Note that you want to take an experience of some sort to relate to a principle. You begin to understand why human-interest accounts are usually the best illustrations. Human-interest accounts are ordinary or extraordinary people in ordinary or extraordinary situations with which ordinary people can identify. Tell me about something ordinary or extraordinary that I can identify with. That principle that you want to make clear is now going to connect to my life. That is what we are trying to do. It is why old preachers' tales are usually problematic. If all of your illustrations in a sermon are about steam engines, it might be interesting, but it is removed from my life. You are not involving me, which is the very point of the illustration.

Some of this is expressed well by Lewis Paul Layman, who did a lot of work in the last generation on the use of illustration. He says, "An illustration is a piece of life. It is a setting so familiar to the hearer, so totally believable, that a minimum description enables him to see it and live it. If the illustration is well proportioned, designed, and chosen, the hearer recognizes, 'I have seen that. I have heard that. I have handled it.'" He reflects on John again. If the illustration is well done, the hearer says he has seen, heard, and handled it. Even if we tell an old-time illustration, we contemporize it. We find some way of connecting it to our experience today. Maybe we change the language we use, maybe we say, "At a museum I saw..." Somehow we need to bring that event into present experience so that the listener says, "This is what I understand." We need to use our own heart, mind, and experience to do this. It will throw you sometimes because you might want to use a great illustration out of Dostoyevsky. That is powerful in your English class, but you may need to adapt it to tell it here in a sermon. D. W. Ford writes, "Admittedly to quote from Dante, Dumas, Dostoyevsky, and Dickens is impressive. But what a congregation will most readily hear is references by the preacher to objects, events, and people's comments that he has seen and heard himself in the present locality of the people. An illustration drawn from the derelict house in the next street, the aftermath of a recent storm, a local flower show, a current play at the theatre, is the kind that is most serviceable." He says this because in using illustrations you want to motivate, not just inform. Take that proposition to their lives. If you go to a more distant setting, like a NASA engineer on loan to the FAA, you try to relate it to the people in some way. I asked, "Do you remember all the accounts of planes falling out of the air because of wind sheers?" I try to engage my audience in some way instead of removing them from the event. I try to pull them into the event. Hopefully they will remember reading or hearing about what I referred to. They may ask, "Why did they not install that equipment at the ends of runways?" Try to engage the hearer, even if your illustration is something removed from them. The proposition and the truth should be associated with an event with which they can identify.

We talked about using your own mind-heart reading in experience. It is not wrong also to use illustrations of others as catalysts for your own. Once you begin preaching a lot, you begin to recognize not only the power of illustration, but also that it is hard to find as many as you would like. Let me say a couple of things. It is not wrong to use illustrations of other preachers whom you hear. You just need to give the credit away. You do not have to say, "Tim Keller, in his sermon in Covenant Seminary's Chapel on November 3..." The minimum number of words that you can use to give the credit away and still keep your integrity are, "A preacher said..." or "I have heard it said..." Your sermon is not a research paper. As long as you give the credit away, your integrity is intact. That is what you want. People get in trouble, not because they do not cite the footnote, but because they take the credit. As long as you give the credit away, you do not need all that footnote citation material. Most of you who go into



a preaching setting will go first into assistant or associate pastor roles. But some of you will go into solo pastorate roles in small churches. I want you to think about what that means: many of you will be preaching or teaching several times a week. You might regularly do Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Sunday school, midweek service, a funeral, a wedding, and the meeting at the VFW. The average preacher in a small town at a small church will preach five or six times a week! It is not wrong in my mind to use those books of illustrations and listen to other preachers. Gather, mine, and collect illustrations for your own purposes as long as you do two things. You need to modify the illustration for your purpose and give the credit away. We will talk a lot next time about what it means to modify an illustration. How do I take other illustrations and modify them appropriately for my sermon? Did you ever hear an illustration in a sermon and think, "That does not sound like him. I wonder where he got that." Automatically the message is removed from you. How do we take illustrations and rightly incorporate them into our language and the way we talk? You can use other illustrations as long as they are catalysts for your own.

Let us get into how we tell illustrations. First we need to recognize the story nature of illustrations. A true illustration is not just an allusion to the account of David and Goliath. It is a retelling of the account of David and Goliath. I asked you to think about human-interest accounts. A human-interest account is a story. It is not an allusion to a story, but it is the story itself. Therefore you must introduce the situation and present characters. Someone is involved doing something. You need to identify a problem: something goes wrong, there is a sense of wonder, or they need to find out something. Then there is resolution. Somehow that situation is resolved. Then there is a conclusion. Now that I have been through this story, what is the meaning of it? You cannot do all of that in one sentence. An allusion alludes to another story. A statistic is a reference to a fact that has been found, but none of those are true illustrations. True illustrations are the retelling of a story. We recognize that there is an illustration hierarchy that is of illustrative material. There are things like metaphors: Satan's ways are a web. There are similes: life is like a banana peel. There are examples: I know of an abortion clinic that says it is pro-life. There is analogy: some of you think of God as a grandmother who sits inside the house, banging her cane on the window to get the squirrels to go away from the birdfeeder. He is upset about it, but he cannot do anything about it. That is an analogy; it is not exactly an illustration. An allusion is when the preacher reminds people of a story but does not retell it. A true illustration is the retelling of a story distinguished by lived-body detail presented in narrative. If I were in that situation, what would I feel, hear, smell, and taste? If my body were in that situation, I would be able to describe the sensations. They may be physical or emotional sensations. I need to describe the sensations of someone in that event.

There are also longer aspects of illustration like allegory, novella, and novel. But an illustration is typically a paragraph or two paragraphs in a sermon that tell a story. Two paragraphs is a very long illustration. There some story sermons where the whole story tells a story with a moral. It was done in the Bible, and it is not wrong to do it, but it is not what we will do in this course this semester. This semester we will find out how to do paragraph illustrations that come out of the explanation and demonstrate what the truth is before we apply that truth. A key thing is that an allusion reports on the speaker's memory of an experience. An illustration recreates the experience. An allusion is something like not only referring to a story but also simply referring to an experience. "I can remember when I was a kid, and I loved it when I was able to hit a double. I almost liked it more than when I hit a home run. I loved watching the ball sail over the second baseman's head, into the field." That is somewhere between allusion and illustration. It does not fully tell of an experience, but it is just a reference to something. Often you will get stuck in there somewhere. I want you to think of something that is about a paragraph long that has a story nature.

We create illustrations by using narrative components. We introduce the illustration. Just as stories or

narratives have introductions, illustrations have introductions. First I want to talk about the conceptual introduction. An illustration is always introduced by the last thing you said just prior to it. This is not the way you write English essays. This is a critical difference. In an English essay you may illustrate something you said two sentences ago or even two paragraphs ago. The ear does not function that way. In preaching, the thing that you illustrate is the very last thing you said prior to the illustration. I am talking about the words right before it, not even a sentence ahead. Think about that. You may want to illustrate a couple of subpoints in the explanation. You talk about one subpoint for a couple of minutes, then you talk about another subpoint for a couple of minutes. Then you want to share an illustration about both subpoints together. You should know that, before the illustration, you will have to restate and summarize both subpoints. This illustration will not seem to anybody's ear to be about what you said two or three minutes ago. You will have to summarize again. Even if you gave a statement of the subpoint and two or three minutes of explanation, you cannot illustrate that statement without summarizing the statement again. To the ear, the illustration is always about the very last thing you said. If you think you are illustrating something that was from two or three minutes ago, that is not what the people will think. They think you are illustrating the last thing you said. If you are not, there is confusion. The ear always thinks conceptually that you are illustrating that last thing said prior to the illustration.

The second way that we begin an illustration is with the homiletical introduction, not the conceptual introduction. This is how we start the illustration. This is public speaking, so some of you know this. Others of you have never heard this, so you may not have thought of this before. The first thing that you do when you tell an illustration is pause. You shift gears or put in the clutch. I have said, "I want you to recognize the role that every child has in the kingdom of God. (Pause) Rising out of the swamps of central Georgia is..." You do not tell people that you are about to illustrate. You do not say, "Let me illustrate." That creates what is called linear consciousness. It is like saying, "By the way, we are in an artificial situation, and I am talking to you about an illustration." We do not do that. We do not talk about the components of a sermon in a sermon. Do not say, "My proposition is..." Do not say, "My first main point is..." We do not say, "Let me illustrate." To do that is to deaden the message instead of engaging people. We do not talk about illustrating, we just illustrate, and we do it after a pause. We say the conceptual statement, the last thing we said prior to an illustration, give a pause, and then go into the illustration. We slice out as we begin the illustration an experiential context.

We said we describe an experience, so we need to bracket it. I say the experience I am going to talk about—"Rising out of the swamps of central Georgia..." In doing that, I have put another place in people's minds. You can do this in different ways. You can first begin with a separation of time. Those of you with little kids, at bedtime when you tell the story, the first words you say are, "Once upon a time." You separate the experience by another time. I put time brackets around it. To be a little more biblical, you could say, "The time came when kings went to war and David stayed home." A separation in time begins the narrative. It could also be a separation in space that describes another place. Jesus began a parable this way, "Two men went up to the temple to pray." He begins by taking people to the temple. "A sower went out to the field to sow seed." A place is described. The experience is bracketed by taking people to a different time or place, or time and place. That is separation of situation. You may have heard this during your youth, "A long, long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." Time and place separation occurred there. The Star Wars dramas begin, and yet we know that in narrative terms it is separation of situation. That is how the experience begins. In separation of time, place, and situation, we want to avoid what does not involve people.

The words "Let me illustrate" do not involve people. The words of long ago are, "Do not talk about illustrating; just illustrate." That also means that we get rid of all long citations. We do not say, "Charles

Swindoll in the book *Improving Your Sermon*, Multnomah Press, 1992.” We do not do that. Instead we say, “Swindoll says...” or “I heard a preacher say...” We avoid the uninvolved. Then we use concreteness and detail.

Once we separate the experience, we can begin to tell it with concreteness and detail. This is lived-body involvement. The reason we do this is because the more specific your details, the more powerful the illustration will be. We do this by trying to fully describe the experience with concreteness and detail. We use sensory words that name colors, shapes, sounds, and smells. We describe actions, feelings, and dialogue. We keep trying to involve people. As I do that somehow I create crisis. That does not mean that it always needs to be tragedy. It is what speech communicators call “upsetting the equilibrium.” I described a situation, but there is some complication. It may just be that “his eyes grew wide in wonder.” That makes people think, “Why? What does he see? What is going on?” It does not have to be something bad. It can be “the jewel was so big it glistened in the sun.” It is the complication of introducing a sense of wonder. It could be something tragic and bad, but somehow we need to complicate the situation.

Then we come to a conclusion. We resolve the issues so that the hearer sees what he or she was supposed to find in the illustration. A situation has been described, it is complicated in some way, but there is resolution that is actually a demonstration of the principle that the illustration was meant to illustrate. No one is better at this than the Savior. I want you to think of the way He could have talked about a wayward son being welcomed by a father. Think about what He could have said: “God loves us the way a father welcomes back his son, even when he has gone astray.” That would have been true, but instead He said, “When the prodigal son came to his senses he went back to his father. While he was still a long way off his father saw him and ran to him and threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said, ‘Father I am no longer worthy to be called your son. I have sinned against you and I have sinned against heaven.’ But the father said, ‘Bring the robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Kill the fattened calf, and let us have a feast for this son of mine who was lost, and now he is found. He was dead, and now he is alive again.’ And they began to celebrate.” Jesus illustrates by saying what it feels like to be welcomed back by your father when you have been in a faraway land. When we illustrate, we do not just clarify. We say what it feels like. Here is the experience, so that now you know not just in your head but in your heart also. That is the goal.

In the next lesson, we will be very explicit about things we do technically to make this happen.

**How to Illustrate (continued)**

Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You that we might know You through Your Son. And this is not because of anything we have done but because of an infinite mercy that, before time began, cared for us. Thank You that we can be instruments now of that mercy, yet help us even as we think today about this task of preaching to be better prepared for Your purposes. We ask Your blessing not only for us. We pray, Father, that what we would do would be part of that salt and light in our society. We pray that not only those of our near families and friends would know You, but by our influence in this society, leaders, people, and nations would name the name of Jesus. For we know that there will be a time that comes that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. We are part of the process by which this will occur. We, in these moments, do not feel the magnitude of that. But we ask that You would help us to sense even slightly that the task we are preparing for would be not only important to us but dear to us. Grant us Your blessing even in what we do this day we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

I would like to begin today by having you look at a sample sermon. We will talk very technically about how illustrations function. There are technical things we do to make them work. Last time we talked about why illustrations are important, and we went over some basic story principles of how they work. Now we will see homiletically, in very technical ways, how they fit into a sermon and how you make them serve your purposes.

Let us look at main point number two in a sample sermon. Let us observe some things about it. The main point is: because God will judge sin, we must proclaim His Word to defend the truth. There are subpoints that follow that are answers to analytical questions. The analytical question is “when must we defend the truth?” The first subpoint is “when others abandon sound doctrine.” The second subpoint is “when others flock to false teachers.” The third subpoint is “when others will not even listen.” You have seen the subpoints, and you should recognize that they are in parallel wording. The adjectives, modifiers, and nouns all line up with key word changes. Before you get into the illustration, there is a summary statement. There are three subpoints, but there is a summary statement before the illustration. It says, “Such accounts remind us that even though others may abandon what is sound, flock to what is false, and turn their ears away from the truth so as not even to listen, we still have an obligation to preach the Word.” The key words of the subpoints are underlined in the notes. They are the changed words of the parallel subpoint statements. There is a summary statement prior to the illustration because the illustration always illustrates the last thing you said prior to it. If the illustration is going to be about all three subpoints, you have to bring the subpoints back into view for the ear. We turn the ear into the eye. We bring those subpoints back into the hearing before we tell the illustration. This is the illustration:

As he stood before the Diet of Worms on the afternoon of April 18, 1521, Martin Luther was asked one question: will you recant of your writings and the errors which they contain. After spending the night in prayer searching for the right thing to say, he answered, “Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and counsels, for they have contradicted each other. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me, Amen.” Martin Luther believed the Word of God demanded for him to stand for the truth even in such a difficult situation. He knew that though others might abandon sound doctrine, he must stand firm. When his human judges had the power to

excommunicate him, exile him, or even execute him, he said, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.” Martin Luther believed the church had flocked to false teachers. And knowing they would probably not even listen, he answered them by saying, “Here I stand.”

A diet is a conference or a trial. That is the setting of the illustration. This story is about the famous statement of Luther. You may recognize this.

In this illustration, there is “expositional rain.” The key terms of the subpoints in the explanation have rained down into the illustration. It is what makes the illustration function as illustrating this particular message. Earlier we talked about the aspect of sways-ability. When you say something that is interesting but does not seem to connect, interest goes up, but sways-ability goes down. When we tell illustrations, we connect by using the key words of the subpoints in the illustration. That way there is not a disconnect. The connection is that in this explanation you had subpoints. In the explanation I had a main point statement, then I had a subpoint that had a key word change. I had a second subpoint with key word changes as well. As it were, those words “rained down.” They come down into the telling of the illustration.

Next they will go into the application. You do this because, first, you want to keep credibility in tact. The illustration is not disconnected, but it is illustrating precisely what you said the explanation was about. The reason you keep precision is because you keep the key terms. My illustration is precisely about what I said this text was about. That then enables me to use precisely the terms that I said this text was about when I do application. That does not just maintain continuity; it maintains authority. I tell you to do what I said this text said. I use these terms even to explain the application. I stated the truth, and I proved it was here. When I apply that truth, I have the authority of the Word of God because I proved to you that what I said was in the text. Therefore now I have the authority to apply. This double helix, which looks something like a DNA chain, is made up of strands of concepts and terms. The concepts link together, and the terms are kept together. Your English teacher would say not to do that because using the same terms over and over again is redundant. But we are in an oral medium. We want precisely those terms because we want the ear to say, “I have heard that before. I know that is what that text says.” When you illustrate, you are illustrating the concept because I hear the terms. When you apply those concepts, I know you have the authority because you are using the terms you have used before. Those terms that have always drawn the ear and the attention are the changed words in the parallel statements. When my students turn in subpoints, I am so rigorous in grading to make sure they used parallel language. I do that because I am getting ready for this step. I know that without parallel language that gives us key terms to work with, this could start falling apart. It might hold conceptually, but the ear would not have the terms it needed to hold the matter together. This is true first for illustration, then for application. That is the big picture.

Let us talk about illustration in details and see how it functions in description. We will come back to this example, but I wanted you to see the big picture before we now start talking about the details. We started by saying that you isolate and associate illustrations. You isolate an experience, and you associate it with the concept you want to relate. We talked about ways that you do that. You separate in time, space, or situation. You pause, and you do different things to set up the illustration in order to tell the story. Now we want to think very technically how this small story fits in the life of the sermon you are doing.

Now that we have some to that conclusion of the illustration, we relate and apply it. We relate the details of the story to the principle we apply. The Bible itself tells us why this is necessary. You cannot just tell a story. The Bible said, “Without a parable, Jesus did not say anything to them.” Then it says that later

on in private Jesus explained the parable to His disciples. The story in itself does not explain itself. We often think it does, and if it is close enough conceptually, it may get very close. But people will pick up on all kinds of strange things. “Is this what you meant? Is that what you were talking about?” It is our obligation to not only tell the story but also to tie it to the concept that we relate. We do that by using grouping statements or interpreting statements.

A grouping statement is a sentence or two following the illustration in which the preacher reaches into the illustration for details pertinent to his truth concept, extracts them, and then ties them together with the central idea he wishes to communicate. For example, I tell the illustration, then I reach back into the illustration and pull down the pertinent details that make the point. I say, “This is what I meant to say.” It is the grouping statement that comes at the end of the illustration. It is also preparation for something else because it ties the concept to the forthcoming application. I reach back up into the illustration, pull down the pertinent details, and say, “This is what I mean to say.”

The Martin Luther illustration ended with “He said, ‘Here I stand,’ even though they would not listen.” This is what the preacher said next, “He viewed himself as ultimately responsible only to a divine judge. It motivated him to remain faithful to proclaim God’s Word in the most challenging situations. You and I have a similar calling. In this day and age, where truth is relative to most persons and tolerance for many kinds of evil encouraged, even standing for truth can be dangerous to our friendships, to our reputations, and to our careers.” The preacher reaches back into the illustration. He says Martin Luther was willing to stand firm and to proclaim the truth even though it was dangerous to him. We are called to do the same. Reach back into the illustration, which used these key terms. State the real point you want to make, and that point is preparation for the application. This grouping statement is typically very much like the summary statement that got us into the illustration. Make a statement about what you will illustrate, make the illustration, and make a statement about what the illustration meant, particularly tied to application. It is like saying, “Now you know I am going to illustrate,” which is the last thing I said prior to the illustration. Then after the illustration, there is a grouping statement that says, “Here is the meaning of this,” which is usually tied toward the application. If your eyes scan well, you see that these two statements are often very much like the main point statement itself. That makes sense. If you summarize what the subpoints were, and the subpoints are a development of the main point statement, it would stand to reason that summary at the end of the illustration is a lot like the main point statement. The grouping statement at the end that is going to be applied should probably also be a lot like the main point statement. It is not exactly the same. The grouping statement proclaims the truth out of the main point statement. We knit together concepts with key terms and make sure the ear hears how these things are connected.

Let us talk a little more about what grouping statements are. They are interpreting statements or parallel phrases. In the Martin Luther quote, it was a conceptual summary because you did not hear a lot of parallel wording. Listen to this, which goes back to the story I told you about the children’s fingerprints on the bricks of the church in Savannah. Here is how that illustration ended: “God used faithful children to build His church in that day. And He will use faithful children to build His church in our day also.” The grouping statement uses parallel wording. It says, “Just as something was the same, so this also is the same.” Here is another example about people who had to find their way home through the woods. They were lost but then a guide helped them. I might say, “Even as the children could not find their way home without a guide, we will not find our way to heaven without God.” There is parallel wording there. It is a very common way to end an illustration. The summary points to a concept that is in this illustration (you cannot find your way home without a guide), and then I tie it to the concept I want to say (you cannot get to heaven if you do not depend on God.) I really play off the ear here. I construct what I say, not for you to read, but for you to hear. That knitting depends on the key word structures and

tying things together. So we end the illustration with some grouping statement, either an interpreting statement or parallel wording.

I want you to think even more now about the concept of expositional rain. We are looking at one single main point of the whole sermon. Let us think about what is included in explanation, illustration, and application. There will be, in the explanation, a main point statement followed by subpoints, which are about a paragraph each. The subpoint statement has parallel wording with key word changes. If it is a bullet statement, you have parallel statements with key words changes. If it is an analytical question with responses, you also have statements that are parallel. If you have interrogative subpoints, the interrogatives are in parallel, but the answers also have to be in parallel. It is the answer that holds the key terms. The answers need to be in parallel too. When I have these subpoints, I will develop them. Then I will have a summary statement that gets me into my illustration. My illustration will be told using the key word changes of these parallel statements.

This sounds technical, but if your ear were to hear it, you would recognize what was going on. Because of the key word change I can say, "That is what he is talking about!" The change is what draws the attention, therefore that is what you illustrate. If you have two subpoints together, you will have to summarize them before you tell the illustration. The illustration is told using the key terms, and they will ultimately go down into the application. If my illustration goes between the subpoints, I will only use the key terms of the first subpoint. That will be the case at times. Sometimes a subpoint is so clear, obvious, and dynamic that you will not want to use an illustration there. You may want to use it to deal with the first subpoint. If that is the case, before you do application you will probably have to do another summary that brings both subpoints together. But your illustration might just deal with one subpoint. That is a prudential choice I will make from time to time. Sometimes, though, people will tell an illustration, and through the whole thing you think, "That is really interesting. I wonder what he is illustrating." Probably in his mind the preacher illustrated the subpoint or main point he talked about. But because he did use consistent language, sometimes called term consistency, the ear does not follow it. You do not always have to have subpoints. If you do not have any subpoints, the key terms of the changed term of the magnet clause of the main point is what goes into the illustration and application. It is the thing that changes. The explanation is about the changed term, and it is what goes in the illustration and the application. That concept of expositional rain will be the turnkey from being an average preacher to someone whom people really understand. People will say, "When he preaches, it makes such sense." All you really did was learn the lesson of term consistency. The reason we shy away from it is our English essay training, which taught us to use different terms. We forget that in preaching one of our most powerful tools of communication is repetition. We use those key terms to tie together the message. We will talk about this more, but hold on to it now. When we get to application it will be important. You will begin to apply these truths, and if you begin to change terms, people will think you have no basis for what you say. You will say that it was the concept, but the ear does not hear it that way.

You will have to make transition statements in your sermons. If you have a main point statement, there should be a few sentences that get you ready for the subpoints. It has to flow logically. You do not just speak from point to point. We have talked about an outline of the structure, but there would have to be transitions to make it flow. We will talk about that in a few lessons. The grouping statement sometimes is the transition statement to the application, but other times you will need another statement or two to lead to the application. Each of these points in the outline is a place of transition. The transition should at least include these summary statements, but it may be more. It needs to at least have these summary inclusions.

Sometimes the illustration is about one of the subpoints, but sometimes it is about the main point. Most of the time the subpoints' language reappears in the illustration, but when you do the grouping statement, it is often the main point statement that is the full aspect of what the illustration is about. You tell the illustration to illustrate the main point statement, but you use the key terms of the subpoints to get there. It is part of the building process. At times my illustration may just be about a subpoint. It may be in the summary that I build the concepts together to focus on the main point. Expository rain uses consistent key terms from the explanation in the illustration and application. The key terms in the subpoints are used in the illustration. If there are no subpoints, it is the key terms of the main points that are used. Sometimes key terms from both the subpoints and the main point are in the illustration. It is not just the concepts that should be consistent but also the terms. If you have interrogatives with answers that are positive and negative, you still want to use those key terms in the illustration. This really gets important, not so much in the illustration, but in the application. People will say, "You spent five minutes developing that idea, but you did not do anything with it. Why did you tell me all that if you were not going to apply it?" As preachers we may feel like it was academically interesting for us. We probably do not mean that, but it is the impression when we spend a lot of time in a subpoint but do not do anything with it. If we explain something, people want to know why we took the time to tell them. That is why we pick it back up in application. We will work with this more when we move into application. Right now it is important that you see why subpoints are in parallel and how we use key terms for expository rain.

Let us do a quick summary of other things that you will pick up very readily. We can get illustrations from contemporary experience. They may be experiences we have had or that we gather from others. A second place for illustration source is historical accounts. Finally, we can get illustrations from biblical accounts. Of those three, contemporary illustrations are most likely to connect with people. If you tell historical or biblical illustrations, you have to make sure to bring them into contemporary terms. We will talk more about how to do that later. It is important that we not just make our sermons archaic. That might happen if we simply go to an ancient account of Martin Luther written in the seventeenth century. If I just stick it right into my sermon, it will remove people from it. You also need to make sure your illustrations from a more contemporary book or monthly mailing of illustrations sound like you. They need to fit into your message, so you need to use key words of your sermon. Use the illustration as a catalyst for your illustration. Do not just cut and paste, but you have to retell it. You need to mutate it, change it, or adapt it. You want to retell it using your key terms in your language. That is where the ear says, "This fits! I see exactly what he is talking about." You can therefore legitimately take illustrations from others and adapt them to your purposes in a way that seems inartificial because you use key terms. You can hear sermons where you just know that the illustration is not of that person. It does not sound like them or the rest of the sermon. It just does not fit. The way that we make them fit is with the use of key terms.

One other place to get illustrations from is a "pre-sermon file." This is different than contemporary, historical, or biblical illustrations. Almost every homiletics professor I know has at times said we should collect illustrations. We should create files of illustrations. That is very good to do, and I know very few people who do it. I have found it even more helpful over the years to make what I call a pre-sermon file. I find that many pastors do this. They know what they will be preaching about, at least generally through the quarter, so they create folders. You know that you have a semester or quarter of preaching ahead of you. You might be in the first part of Ephesians 1 the first week and the second part of Ephesians 1 the second week. So you create files for these topics. Through the course of living, as you read newspapers, articles, and magazines or see things on television, you do not try to form a sermon, but you can throw information into the file for the future. That way, when you actually write the sermon that week, you are not scrounging for an illustration on Saturday night. You get into the Saturday night fever of trying to



get everything into the sermon! But if you have been preparing, not extensively but just by throwing things in the file, it will help you a great deal. You will often have more in the way of illustrations and even thoughts about the sermon than you will include in the sermon.

I always keep a note file in my wallet, and as I go through life I make little notes. Right now I have four illustration notes on this one little page. On another page I have three more illustrations. On this third page I have three more illustrations. Typically I will take these and either put them in my pre-sermon file, or if I do not have a place for them, I have my secretary put them in my illustration file. I go through all of life this way because it is my profession to preach. I have adapted to the mode that I have to have illustrations. I go through life collecting them, and you will too. It is not a bad habit to get into. Preachers are in a different mode because everybody else just lets life go by. But we are constantly reminded of spiritual principles as we go through life. We can help people see something better if we take life experiences and turn them into illustrations. "You know what my child did? That was really cute. I better write it down!" You might think that you will remember it later, but inevitably you will forget. There is too much happening and too much going by. So we make notes. I make notes of people in chapel and preachers that I hear. My family gets tired of reading magazines after me because I tend to butcher them with my scissors. I highlight newspapers all the time. It is my profession, and it is what your profession will be too. You get in the habit of collecting, and there is not a thing wrong with it. People will grin a little bit when they know you as their pastor and you take out your wallet and write something down. They know what you are doing. It certainly connects them to your message when they see the life they know come to reality in the messages that you preach. That is the goal.

Let me give some illustration cautions for us. We have talked about the importance of making the abstract familiar. First, do not think of illustrations more highly than you ought to think. Illustrations illustrate a message, but they are not the message. Often when preaching degenerates into entertainment, it is because the preacher has a great set of illustrations and no real text to be explained. The old line is "Every heresy begins with a great illustration." It is also true that many entertaining sermons have great illustrations, but they do not have much meat in them. We are trying to interest people rather than explain a text. It is far better to explain what a text means than to have good illustrations.

There is another way in which I will put a governor on a few of you. We are different kinds of people with different ways of thinking about things and processing information. Some of you will hate doing illustrations. It will be your nature to think, "Why can they not just hear this logical essay that I have put together? It was good enough for Moses, so it ought to be good enough for them." You will not like doing illustrations. Others of you will love doing illustrations. You will have an illustration for every main point and an illustration for every subpoint. Then you will have illustrations for subpoints of subpoints. You will have these skyscraper sermons of illustration upon illustration. And I discourage you from that too. In this course I limit (or force) you to one illustration per main point. For the people who hate doing illustrations, they have to do them consistently. For the people who want to do illustrations all the time, I ask you to spend your nickels wisely. You have to do explanation too. You have to do some exegesis. If I only have one illustration per main point, I might make it the illustration that comes after both or three subpoints. Or I might just put it with one subpoint. Or I might not have any subpoints, and it might be the illustration for the main point statement. But we will not have two and three illustrations in one main point. Wherever you think it will best serve your purpose, do one illustration per main point this semester.

A second caution for illustrations is do not think less of illustrations than you ought to think. I have listed for you the hierarchy of memory retention. This can often be very discouraging to preachers. The most remembered feature of any sermon is the illustration. In fact, the last illustration is the most likely

to be remembered. The second most remembered illustration is the first one. The third most likely thing to be remembered in a sermon is any other illustration in the middle! Illustrations are the most remembered aspect of sermons. It is true of you, too, and not just “little minds” out there. If not illustrations, the next most likely remembered portion of the sermon is the application. In particular, the applications we most strongly disagree with are remembered. You will remember the part that you do not like from the preacher! Next remembered, after applications you strongly disagree with, are those that you strongly agree with. Here is the hard thing for preachers. If you just mildly agree or give assent without even hearing the sermon, we do not remember it at all. You either strongly agree or strongly disagree or you will not remember it at all. That is threatening, is it not? We are pretty far down the list, and we have not mentioned explanation at all. No one goes home and says, “Was not that a wonderful second subpoint under his third main point?” No one says that. They say, “There was some impact on my life by that.” Think about that. We pour our hearts and souls, sweat and toil, into the explanation and exegesis, but people are not going to remember it. Be careful, though, this is very deceptive. If there is not solid content, they will remember you as a shallow preacher. They will think there was not much thought there and nothing to sink their teeth into. They will feel like there was nothing really authoritative for their souls. The thing that people remember more than anything else out of a sermon is the ethos of the speaker. They remember this more than illustrations, applications, and explanations. If you get caught into thinking that illustrations make people think you are a good speaker and you bank on the illustrations rather than the meat of the sermon, they will remember that you do not have much to say to them. We construct homiletically knowing how people work. Illustrations are powerful tools of communication, so we want to remember that and not think less highly of them than we ought to think. But we should not be deceived because illustrations cannot carry the spiritual water themselves. Explanation is also needed to communicate, “That man has something to say to me. There is spiritual weight in what he says, and that means I have to do all of these things.” Even though this is the most remembered, if there is not gravity to the explanation, then the person himself will not be listened to.

As we begin to think about the importance of content, I want to think about some cautions for illustrations. There are 10 of them that I will mention. We have begun to realize how important illustrations are, and we know they require crafting with care and integrity. That is why I give you these cautions. A lot of this has to be under the rubric of pastoral prudence. I cannot tell you when you have crossed the line with what is appropriate. I want you to begin to feel, not only the power of illustrations, but the seductive nature of them. They can take you down paths, because they communicate so well, that may undo what you want to do. I want you to think about some of these cautions even as you think about the power of illustrations.

The first caution is to be accurate. To talk about the 76 Theses of Martin Luther or the prison ministry of George Colson or Einstein’s discovery of x-rays may be very interesting, but you just lost all credibility. Those were all inaccurately stated. In the course of preaching I have done every one of these things, and you will do them all as well! But the goal is not to blow your credibility and your illustrations. You need to look up the facts. Being able to “google” things these days has done wonders for being more accurate. You can find out quickly when something was written or what the correct name is. It really helps to be able to get your facts straight. That helps a lot with the illustrations.

A second caution that is more difficult is to be careful about what you reveal. Homiletics professors debate all the time about how we can and should talk about counseling situations. My thought is that counseling situations are usable only if you are obviously protecting identities. There are teachers of preaching who will say that preachers should never use illustrations from counseling situations. They say this because no one will come to you if they think you will talk about it. At times I think people need to know there is counseling help in the church though. Progress can be made spiritually with a wise

counselor and a spiritually minded person. But if you even give a hint of who the person is whom you are talking about, it is death to your ministry. Sometimes ways that we can do this is to talk in ways that obviously hide names. I might say, “A man came to me recently to talk about a problem in his marriage. I will call him Bill. What Bill said to me was...” When I use the phrase, “I will call his name Bill,” it tells you his name is not Bill. I just made it obvious that I am protecting this person’s identity. If in the course of telling the story I tell you the make and model of his car, that is not good! I have underdone things. But if I can tell the account in such a way that I say, “I want to tell you how people can be helped,” it is a redemptive use of counseling situations rather than a revealing use of counseling situations. If I can use it redemptively, it is okay.

There is so much caution that should be put on this, though. If you do it weekly, no one will come to you. If on occasion you can tell people how there is help in a situation, that may be something to think about. It gets difficult when the church staff sees who comes and goes from my office because they may know who an illustration is about. My office was in my home when I pastored a small church. Our home was on a major thoroughfare, so when people came for counseling, they would park in our driveway for a while. Then people would say, “I saw John’s car over there the other day. Is everything okay?” We began to urge people to park other places for that very reason. I cannot give the specific rules of how to do this, but you have to obviously protect people’s identities. If the word “recently” is inappropriate, do not use the word recently. You might say, “I remember a man who came to me and...” That puts it in a larger frame of time because you have not put any time frame on it. I want you to be very, very cautious, and at the same time you can sometimes give people hope. There is something you can say about a situation like that. So you need to be careful what you reveal about counseling situations.

You also need to be careful what you reveal that may be compromising. Tales on your family fall into this category. If you talk about your family, not only do you have to get permission, but in the course of telling the illustration you have to say that you got permission. Otherwise people will think that you are abusing your own loved ones. Even if you tell a positive thing, it is always embarrassing to be the point of a sermon. Even if it is positive, you should say, “I asked Jane if I could tell you this, and she said I could...” It may sound silly, but you need to do it. People may laugh and think it is funny, but they will not trust you.

You also need to be careful what you reveal about uncaring attitudes. This includes stereotypes that are ethnic or gender related or making fun of other people’s dialects. It could be talking the way an older person, a Native American, or someone of another race talks. Even just using someone else’s dialect to mimic it is typically insulting unless it is your ethnic dialect. So the only person you can make fun of is yourself. You do not recognize that mimicking someone else’s dialect is presumed to be ridiculing. We could have uncaring attitudes in criticism of people regarding other political parties, religious groups, churches, faiths, or even occupations. “I went to a used car dealer, and I said...” You just insulted all the people in your church who sell cars by bringing a stereotype on them. Lawyers and blondes are often the object of jokes, but pastors cannot tell those jokes. They certainly cannot tell them from the pulpit without creating attitudes.

Unsavory pasts are another area to be careful about what you reveal. We talked about this before, and I do not have a Bible verse to back this up. Sometimes it is my obligation to talk to you about the realities of this culture. If you have difficulty in your past regarding chemical addiction, you can probably talk about it from the pulpit if it is far enough in the past. You can probably talk about God giving you victory, how He has helped, and the difficulty of it. You can probably talk about the mishaps of your teenage years. You can talk about the difficulties of raising your children. Sexual conduct is probably the thing that is very difficult for people to hear in this culture. I suggest to you men that at times if you

are speaking at a men's group, there may be an opportunity to be very honest with people about what men struggle with. But to talk in the pulpit about sexual practices, even from years ago, that are inappropriate for Christians to pursue makes it very hard for people in the congregation to hear that and still trust you. I cannot tell you never to do that, I just want you to be very cautious. This is the gasoline type of discussion on our culture, and you need to be very cautious about how you have that type of discussion. I cannot defend that. In some ways, I confess, it bends to the sin on our culture that some things are more taboo than others to talk about. I acknowledge that, but part of your job as a pastor is to exegete your culture as well as your text. Consider what people need to hear and what they are able to hear and still treat you as a pastor. Make those prudential choices as well. We usually think when we preach that Sunday morning is the only time I can preach. But there are a lot of opportunities to begin to salt the congregation with issues that they need to deal with.

Obviously sexual sin is a huge problem in this culture. Everybody here struggles with it. When we say not to speak about it from the pulpit, we also need to realize that we need to provide tools for people to handle sexual sin. I need to recognize that, because of the degree of struggle, how I deal with it must be managed very carefully or I will actually hinder my ability to help people. I really want to encourage you to use pastoral prudence and exegete the congregation. I want to make you aware of the difficulty people have with this situation more than telling you never to mention it or to mention it all the time. I want you to be aware that it is very hard for people to deal with. Right now Harvest Ministries is here in Saint Louis, which helps people who are sexually broken through pornography or sexual addictions of various sources. To talk about that in itself is very helpful in this culture. The far end of not dealing with sexual issues when they needed to be dealt with would be like Amy Carmichael. In the Victorian era, she was trying to rescue Indian girls from temple prostitution. When she would come to the United States to try to talk about that, because of the Victorian ethics, she could not in public mention what her ministry was. She would have been thrown out of the churches. But because of her persistence and speaking in private to a few people, she was able to raise funds to change a whole culture of India. Now Graham Waterhouse, one of our graduates, is going to Thailand to deal with very similar issues of the sex trade. The first time she gave her talk here in chapel, we had board wives who were here listening. I heard them gasp about what she would be doing; yet ultimately they got behind her. She had to be aware that this was very difficult for them to hear and think about, yet it was necessary. You have to pick your moments. Wisdom knows there is a tension, and pastoral prudence helps you know how to deal with it. Wisdom is not there when you say, "They ought to know that everybody struggles with that, so I can just talk about it." That is not very pastoral at all. It is very hard for someone to know how to deal with it; that is why they struggle. Pastoral prudence says, "I will deal with that carefully."

Let me move on quickly to other cautions. Be careful what you endorse. Entertainments are one area of potential landmines, particularly movies, music, books, and television shows if they have certain content in them. This includes sex, violence, profanity, or what people may view as values of our culture that are inappropriate to endorse. It is curious that people nowadays will talk about the obscenity of *Leave It to Beaver*. People will say that they were just emphasizing middle class, American, materialistic values. I understand that there may be values there that you do not want to endorse, but I am not sure that that is as bad as some other things. At the same time there are things that you want to be careful of. You make those choices by exegeting the congregation as well as the text. For some congregations, you can mention particular R-rated movies that the pastor, for whatever cultural exposure, has seen. But in other congregations, a pastor will find himself looking for a job if he mentions that he went and saw such a movie. You may not like that, but that is the culture in which we live. You do not just talk to all adults when you are a pastor in the pulpit. You talk to parents, toddlers, grandmothers, and teenagers. You recognize that to simply mention without discretion movies that have strong sexual, violent, profane content is actually not to be pastoral at all. You make prudential choices, and you get into trouble when

you do not think. Or you end up saying that whatever is acceptable to you must be acceptable to everyone else. It is a strange thing to become a pastor and realize that you are not just responsible for yourself anymore. You are responsible for the souls of many people. This includes baby Christians through very mature Christians. You are responsible for them all. Our tendency is to say, "It does not bother me, therefore it is okay." But a pastor has to think about what is best for everyone. Some need to be moved to become more understanding, and others cannot take it yet. You need to exegete them all.

Be careful about recreations. Can you quote about the fact that you went down and had a wonderful dinner at Harrah's Casino last week? Some people will accept that, but others will look for your scalp when they hear that. Another one that depends on the church that you go to is whether or not you can mention major league sports that are played on Sunday. "Remember that Super Bowl two years ago when...?" Certain churches get very upset if you talk about the Super Bowl because it is always played on a Sunday. You need to exegete the congregation as well as the text to determine what you can mention from the pulpit.

Be careful even about what you endorse in terms of quotations. It is wonderful to quote from Schaffer, but a lot of people quote from Bonhoeffer. That is difficult in evangelical circles because Bonhoeffer's biblical position was not that the Bible was inerrant. He had wonderful social ethics, but his biblical understanding was not what many evangelicals will share. What about Rudolph Bultmann? He had a lot of insight into Scripture, but you probably cannot mention him and be okay. If you mention someone who will compromise what you are perceived to be, you need to explain both what they said and why you mention them. If you know what is compromising about them, you should mention it. Those are the easy ones, but here are some hard ones for those of us in Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) circles. Robert Dabney and Stonewall Jackson might be Bible-believing men and great theologians, but they also endorsed slavery in the course of their lives. Can your congregation hear that, should they hear it? These are very hard choices. In a lot of places I go, pastors will have a picture of Stonewall Jackson on their walls. I tell them that is great for the suburban, urban, white, southern culture that you are in, but if any African American walks into your office, he will now walk out of your office and out of your church. Is that what you want to happen? Make choices that take into consideration who you minister to now, who you are going to minister to, who you endorse, and what it means.

The next caution is to be careful what you describe in illustrations. Once we learn the power of illustrations to engage, we will begin to recognize that there are many aspects of our lives that are fun to talk about, particularly the ones that are exciting. "During the labor of our firstborn, when my wife was at eight centimeters..." The older generation just fainted, but you have videotapes of it! You have to exegete the congregation as well as the text. These are the four "B's" of being careful what you describe: blood, births, bedrooms, and bathrooms. I will let your mind take care of all of those and tell you just to be careful.

The next caution is to not be the hero. If you do something good, you need to give the credit to God. A way to not be the hero of your own illustration is to tell it in the third person. You may really want to talk about how a wonderful experience happened. The Lord may have brought someone into your life whom you were able to lead to spiritual maturity in some way, and you might want to talk about that. It is often better to say, "I know a pastor who..." The pastor who you know is you, but you do not want to talk about this wonderful thing that you did in front of everyone. If you do talk about the wonderful thing that you did, it is often helpful to say, "I want you to know that I was scared about that. The Lord helped me do this." Confess your weakness even as you tell something positive that happened. Give credit to Him, "The Lord helped me. The Lord enabled me. The Lord carried me through."

You also need to be honest in your illustrations. I say that because of the power of illustrations. The more you begin to use illustrations, you will learn the power of those things that happened to you. To talk about something happening to another preacher has a little power, but it is so much more powerful to say, "I remember when..." That never happened to you though; you read it somewhere. Do not say it is true if it is not. You can use a fable or fictional account as an illustration, but you need to introduce these illustrations with "Let us say ...," "imagine that..." or "I can imagine it would be like..." As long as you put those little phrases at the beginning, everyone knows that you are telling an account that does not have all truth in it. They are perfectly willing to accept it then. You get into trouble when you say that it did happen when it did not. Do not say it happened to you if it did not. This is similar to what I just said. You may have heard Swindoll say it, but do not take it as your own experience.

This has gotten some of my friends in very big trouble. I remember a guy who came here in chapel, preached a sermon, and told an illustration of something that happened to him. The difficulty was that Sproul had been here a few weeks earlier and said it happened to him! Everyone knew this man was lying. You just wanted to die for the guy. He said it happened to him, and he obviously heard it from Sproul. Do not say it happened to you. These days there is so much availability of other people's sermons on the Internet and cassette tapes. You and I both can begin to label the people who are out of their pulpits today for plagiarism. To use other people's illustrations and be perfectly fine you can say, "I have heard it said..." That is all you have to do. You do not have to quote source and all that other stuff. You could also say, "Preachers say..." or "I can remember someone once saying..." All those phrases that help you give away the credit make it okay to use someone else's illustration. I have heard a pastor with full integrity say, "I was in Dallas last week, and I must tell you I heard a sermon that I want you to hear. I am telling you that I am passing along to you what came to me." People fully and readily accepted it. He did not do that every week, but he heard something he wanted them to hear. He gave the credit away and basically presented someone else's sermon. It was perfectly fine because he gave the credit away.

The last thing I will say about being honest is even if an illustration is true but does not seem true, question its use. I was pastor of a church one time, and we built a new building. It was a very cloudy day, and at the time that the steeple was put on the building with the crane the sun broke through a crack in the clouds and it just put a shaft of light right on the steeple as it was being put on the building. It was not across the field; it was right on the steeple. I even have videotapes of that, but whenever I tell it to people they do not believe me. They think I am doing the "preacher elaboration," so I do not tell it anymore except to this class. It creates so many questions that I cannot use it. You might say at times even if it is true but it creates doubts to your credibility you should question whether or not to use it.

Sometimes there are social issues that in order to discuss legitimately you must bring in graphic details. If I am going to talk about partial birth abortion, it may be very hard to get anywhere without giving some specifics. You have probably heard pastors do this, and I have done it too: tell people a week ahead of time that you will be talking about something graphic in church next week. Or in the morning service say, "Tonight in the evening service we will talk about something that is very difficult. It is going to relate to this issue, and if your children are not ready to hear that, I want you to be aware. This is what we are going to be talking about." You can even say that again in the service itself. "We are going to talk about some very graphic things because you need to know the truth." Give them a heads up. That is very powerful, strong, and right to do to be fair to people.

The next caution is to be real. We really like identifiable human-interest accounts. People like to identify with you. It helps to talk more about what is going on in our lives now than the great saints of yesteryear. This is tough, but be wary of it. If my illustrations are only of William Carey and Martin Luther,

people ultimately think that the faith does not apply to regular folk. I am not saying to dispense with those. But if you use the giants of the faith as in illustration, I would use some midgets in the sermon too. I would use some regular folks and their difficulties. If you only use the giants, then people will feel like the faith has nothing to do with real people. One way that you can make the sermon real is redemptive transparency. Talk about your own struggles. Forgive me, because this is graphic language for a moment. It is the difficulty of the pastor knowing this: the pulpit is not just a feel-sorry-for-me booth. "I am so wicked. I am so bad." It is redemptive transparency, "I struggled, but God has helped." It is not just recounting the struggle so people will feel bad for you. It is so that they will know there is hope. This is redemptive transparency. We should often include ourselves in the struggle but show that God provides victory.

You should also be complete and finish where you begin. I tell you these things, and I still make mistakes all the time! You tell an illustration in the sermon, and you get to the point you wanted to make, so you stop. Then at the door everyone says, "Well, did he get home or not?" You forgot to finish the story! If you tell a story that is incomplete, people will just hang there. They almost do not hear the rest of the sermon. If you tell the beginning of something, try to resolve it.

The next caution is to be balanced. Do not use the same source for illustrations too often. You cannot talk about baseball all the time. Military guys, you cannot refer to your military experience all the time. Use those stories about three times a year and that is it. If you do it all the time, even though it is a big part of your life, it will remove people. Do not talk about your baby, the dog, or your hunting adventures all the time. You need to vary your stories. You also need to be precise. Try very carefully to use expositional rain so that people know what you are doing.

Let me say a few final things by way of five key reminders on illustrations. Illustrations are told using the key terms (changed terms in parallel statements) of subpoint statements. The process by which the key terms of the explanation's subpoint statements "drop down" into the illustrations and applications is called "expositional rain." Since an illustration is about "the last thing said prior to it," the key terms of a subpoint statement (or multiple subpoint statements, if they are being illustrated together) should be placed in a summary statement immediately prior to the illustration. The key terms of bullet-and-answers-to-analytical-question subpoints are found in the parallel subpoint statements; however, the key terms of interrogative subpoints are found in the parallel answers to the interrogatives. If there are no subpoints in a main point, then the key terms for "expositional rain" are found in the magnet clause of the main point statement.

## **Application**

Let us review a little bit. The difference between an illustration and a mere allusion is that an allusion refers to a story, but an illustration retells the story. The key difference between an allusion and an illustration is lived-body detail. An illustration has the detail of what you see, sense, hear, smell, and experience if you were in the situation reliving it. That is lived-body detail. An allusion does not have those things; it just refers to the story. The retelling of the story involves lived-body detail. Listeners automatically assume a preacher illustrates the last thing he said prior to the illustration. Afterward an interpreting or grouping statement appears at the end of the illustration. It reaches up and gets pertinent details and relates to the principle that was illustrated. It is the interpretation of the illustration that comes at its end.

We will see in this lesson that the interpreting statement also does something else. It is the automatic introduction to the application. There are some important cautions to be aware of when illustrating. I will not list them all, but they include being precise, accurate, and not thinking more highly of it than you ought to think. The key terms for “expositional rain” originate in the subpoint statements. They rain down in the illustration and the application. If you do not have subpoints they are the key terms from the magnet clause of the main point. If these are bullets or answers to analytical questions, the key terms are in the statements. If the subpoints are interrogatives, the key terms are in the answers to the questions. Whatever we say is the point of the subpoint is what holds the key terms. In analytical question responses and bullets, the subpoints are actually statements, and the key terms are in the statements. If you have interrogatives, multiple questions, the key terms are in the answers to the questions. The focus is in the answer to the interrogative, and in that case the key term is in the answer. This points out that not only the interrogatives are parallel in wording but the answers are also parallel in wording. Otherwise you cannot find the key terms.

Let us pray, and we will move forward with today’s lecture.

*Heavenly Father, the Word that You have given us is true, and not only is it true but it has been opened to Your people. We pray, Father, that not only would it be opened to us but the mysteries of life that are there, which Your Spirit reveals, would be ours to give. Use us as instruments of Your glory though we be earthen vessels. Time and again we remind ourselves that though our brokenness, sin, and ability seems to remove from us the task of carrying Your holy Word, it is yet being committed to our care. When we speak, Father, when we are committed to Your truth and speak it faithfully, You work beyond us. Your Spirit engages the hearts of others and takes to them that which you want them to know from all eternity and for all eternity. Grant this day as we move to this step that the preachers of old have said is the chief aim of preaching, even its application to the lives of people, that You would instruct us well. We ask that not only the information that we desire but also the transformation that we desire for Your people would be well within our hands for Your purposes. Grant us insight, we pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

Yesterday I spoke with a pastor who is a long-time friend. He was in a position and said, “When I gathered with friends about 10 years ago in the city that I minister in, we as pastors talked a whole lot about the things that we would do to reach a community that was largely unreached at that time, at least from Presbyterian and Reformed circles. We came up with all kinds of strategies of what we would do for this region, and we have had a lot of success. If you look at the size of churches now, they are typically quite large churches. They have multiplied, and they have lots of people. But at this stage, 10 years later, while our churches are big, we have lots of people, and our strategies have worked well, I



wonder what difference we have made. If we were not here, would our people be living any differently?” That is a rather remarkable statement. They are in our churches, they worship, and we have had some good strategies here in human terms that have resulted in people coming. But as I look at the people who are here, if we were not here, would they really be living any differently?

The question he asks is a tough one for pastors. It is “What is the effect of the word that I preach? Do I see lives not only informed but also transformed? Is there any difference as a consequence of the Scriptures?” This is a question for evangelicals that is particularly difficult in this day and era. There are some statistics that are mentioned in the introduction of your reading. Let me add a few to them. Approximately a third of American adults say they are born-again believers. You know there is a lot of variation to what that means, but it is a figure that has not changed in almost three decades. However, there seems to be little difference in the behavior of those who are born again from the time that they say they are born again and after that point. In fact, surveys say that in each of three major categories (legal drugs, driving while intoxicated, and marital infidelity), behavior actually deteriorates after people said they have been born again. The incidence of drug use and illicit sex roughly doubles after people say they have been born again. The incidence of drunken driving actually triples after people say they have been born again. Recent surveys indicate the incidence of divorce is actually higher among those who indicate that they are born-again believers. A recent Zogby pole indicated that Internet pornography sites are visited by 18% of born-again believers, a figure that differs only by 2% from the general population.

Those are scary figures. We could debate every one of them regarding whether the survey was done properly. Focus on the Family particularly debated the divorce statistics, and there was a lot of news about it. But would anyone really contend that even if the incidence of divorce is not greater among evangelicals than in the general population that it is common among evangelicals as well as in the general population? If that is so, how can we say that we, who are committed to the Word of God and seeing it take root in the lives of people, are being effective? What are we being called to do? It seems clear that, while we have been communicating information for generations, something is not communicating. There is not contact being made between what people know to do and what they are doing. At least for preachers in all eras that easy disconnect is application. It is actually easy to preach information and not think about how it applies. I will tell you, when we had the Connect Conference here this year with over 200 pastors, I simply said to them, “What you recognize after you have preached a while is that outlines jump off the page at you. That is not the hard work anymore. The hard work is making it real to people.” What difference is this going to make in your life? Now that you know it, what difference will it make? That is always the sweat and the blood of preaching. We want to talk today about both the importance of application and how to do it. Next time we will talk about how to get past some of the very real hurdles to doing application well.

As we think about why we do application, one of the reasons we do it is the recognition that, without application, meaning is hidden. That means that application is essential for full exposition. To say, “Here is the tense of the verb,” “Here is what ancient Israel was like at that time,” or “Here is what it meant to be a shepherd in the oriental fields,” can all be good exposition. But if the information does not come into our lives, then even though you can know that information, you still do not know the meaning of the text for us. For those of you in hermeneutics already, it is the very important difference between meaning and significance. I can know the meaning of something, but I can still not know the significance of it. For instance, “pray without ceasing” means you should keep on doing it, but I may not know what that means for my life. How am I supposed to pray when I do not feel like doing it, when I am too busy to do it, or when I do not think to do it? What is the significance of the instruction if you have not related it to my life? You have not really explained the meaning of the text in terms of significance if application is not apparent.

Let us think about what application is. Application is the personal consequence of the truth the Scripture presents. It answers the question “So what?” Application converts lectures to sermons, information to exhortation, and intellectual acquisition to life transformation. Almost any preacher will tell you that application is the most difficult feature of preaching. Application requires the preacher to take a stand and therefore demands courage. It is far easier to dispense information than to seek transformation.

If it is so hard and difficult and seems to be ignored so often, do we need to do it? Let me you give some quick ideas about application. Those of you who were trained in the Westminster Standards, the third catechism question asks, “What do the Scriptures principally teach?” The answer is “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.” Explanation is what man is to believe concerning God. Application is what duty God requires of man. The Westminster Divines were not willing to push those apart. They said the Scriptures principally teach both what man is to believe and what God requires as a consequence. It is not either/or; it is the two together. That is a very modern concept that the Westminster Divines came up with. Some of you are now reading John Frame’s *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, which is the idea of praxis theology. He makes the point that if one does not know how to apply the truth, it is not really true to you. William Ames, the Puritan who wrote *The Medula*, said, “Theology is the science of living to God.” He said theology is not just the science of knowing God, which is what you would think it to be. He said it is not just the study of the information about God, but he said it is the science of living to God. We think of people who are informed in Scripture, committed to our standards, and committed to doing what Scripture says. When they think about preaching, it is not just communicating the informational truths. It is saying what difference it makes in your life. In preaching, we need to tell both parts of what the Bible says. We need to say what this text principally teaches and what duty God requires of man. I cannot adequately explain the Bible to you if I have not put both hands in front of you. So application concentrates on what duty is required of man. Application answers, “So what?”

Application may be behavioral or attitudinal. We often think, particularly early in preaching, that application is primarily about things to do. “Do not do this, do that, read this book, pray more...” All those are appropriate applications, but remember that the Scripture says out of the heart are the issues of life. I often find that when young people get frustrated or angry in the pulpit it is because they see people not doing what they have said to do. “I told you to do this, and you are not doing it.” We have to do some self-analysis at times. If anybody knows to do what the Scriptures say, it is the preacher. Yet the preacher still sins. We know what to do, and we do not do it. So the fault is not that our information basis is too low, it is that our hearts are weak. As I listen to starting preachers, they usually emphasize the behaviors. When I listen to pastors who have preached for 20 to 25 years, they almost always emphasize the heart. They do not ignore behaviors, but they know the real issue is the heart. Until I deal with that, the behaviors will not result. Application has to take both into account: behaviors and attitudes.

There are various specific types of application possibilities. One application possibility might be a command to obey. Application could also be an attitude to be changed. It could be a faith concept to be reinforced. Moses often said, “Remember the God who brought you thus far...” “Here I raise this Ebenezer.” “Thus far has the Lord helped us.” “Every time you pass this stone, remember what God has done.” To reinforce a faith concept is a form of application. To identify a sin to be corrected is also a form of application. We could come up with many more, but those are some of the basic categories. Think about the positive and negative sides of obedience: obey and repent. It could also be a faith concept to be reinforced or an attitude to be changed. “You must love people enough to forgive them even when they have wronged you.” That works at the attitude. Because application seeks heart and life

transformation rather than mere mind expansion, Broadus, the father of expository preaching, calls application “the main thing to be done” in expository preaching. Even to this day it surprises me that Broadus would say that. I expect him to say, as the father of expository preaching, that explanation is the main thing to be done. But he kept driving it home and said that we really need to be about transforming people, not just informing them. He said application is the main thing to be done. Spurgeon said it this way, “Where the application begins the sermon begins.” He did not mean that on paper the application did not come until the end of the sermon. But he says that until you have really thought about what difference this makes in people’s lives, you do not have a true sermon yet. We typically think of Spurgeon as the greatest of the Reformed preachers, but he also recognized the importance of application.

Let us talk about why application must be included. It explains the reason for the exposition. “Why did I tell you all those things?” It is like the doctor telling you to take some pills but not telling you what they are for. Who is going to take the pills? Why did we get all the information from the explanation if we do not know what to do with it? The goal is the application, which explains the reason for all the information. If I go through a main point statement and then two subpoints, by the time I do application I need to refer to those statements again. If I do not refer to them, people will wonder what all the information was for. “If you break down the text this way and it has no significance for me, why did you spend the time doing it?” This means that if we break the text down into subpoints like this, we know we need to apply them. We told people to “take these pills,” so now we need to tell them why. In the sermon we want to get leverage for the application. The argument that we have developed in the explanation, the tone that we use in the message, the illustrations, grammar discussions, and the context we refer to is all used as weight on the fulcrum of exposition to move application. What difference will this make in your life? If you think about the typical academic sermon, explanation takes up three-fourths of the point, illustrations are one-fourth of the point, and application is “go and do likewise.” You really need to focus on the main point and build everything to give leverage for the final instruction of the transformation that results. You cannot do that in one sentence; there is more to it than that.

Beyond that, application focuses the exposition. Exegesis and exposition are bottomless pits of infinite commentary possibilities without a purpose clearly in mind. This has already happened. In working on sermon projects, my students go to the commentaries. Even though they only have a paragraph of the text, they ask me, “Do you expect me to cover all of this text? There is so much here!” That is a really good understanding. There is so much information. You need to determine what you will narrow in on and talk about by deciding your application. Application becomes the purpose-driven sermon. It is what drives the sermon, not because you have not researched it. But once you see what the significance is for the people whom you have exegeted, as well as exegeting the text, you begin to recognize how to marshal your forces. You know what to group and what to separate. You will know what your best leverage will be and what you can leave to another time. Knowing what the application will be for the sermon helps you focus the exposition that you will use. Application is the end of sermon research. You do not want to cover what you are to do or believe until you determine what the text means. You do not want to come up with the application until you have researched the text. But it is the beginning of sermon writing. Application is the end of sermon research, but it is the beginning of sermon writing. It converts the exegetical material to the homiletical message. First I have to exegete the text and determine what is there. Next I think about what the applications should be. Then I have to think about the most salient information to bring in order to move people. What do I need to concentrate on, and what can I diminish in importance because I recognize it is not so central to the application? How will I word these things given the people to whom I am speaking? What is their background knowledge, and what am I driving at? How am I going to word these things if I do not know the application? Having application clearly in mind helps me structure and word the homiletical message. It should not make me

structure and word the exegetical message. There is a difference. Application is the end of the research, but I should know what the significance is before I begin writing the message in homiletical terms.

I have told you before about the left field rule, which is the way to know when your message has gotten off track and you have missed the bus. You are in left field when at the end of explanation and illustration you say to yourself, “I wonder how I am going to apply this.” At that point you have missed the bus. How did you even write the explanation and illustration if you did not know what the application was going to be? Application is the target; it is the main thing to be done. If I fired all my arrows of explanation and illustration, but I did not have a target, how did I know what to shoot at? The application becomes the target of the message. I am not the only one who says this. Jay Adams, when he refers to the way in which we form messages, does not use the term application. He uses the *telos* principle, which in Greek means the end or the goal. He says that before you develop the explanation and illustration, you must have the goal in mind. The goal is always transformation. Swanson uses the “aim” terminology in order to form its various structures. What does the sermon take aim at? I told you already that Brodas says application is the main thing to be done. I have told you about the fallen condition focus (FCF). What is the burden of the message? The FCF happens prior to any of the main points, so everything that you form, including the individual main points, point back to the burden. This also means that the application of every main point is directed at the FCF.

One of the ways that you can really ensure that you have sermonic unity is by looking at the applications of the main points and asking, “How do those applications deal with the original FCF? Does every application deal with this?” A shotgun sermon is one that is all over the place: love your neighbor, read your Bible more, tithe, go to the childcare center and help people, and remember the starving people in Africa. That happens because the preacher typically gave explanation and illustration and threw in application to go with it. Somewhere a homiletics professor told them they were supposed to do application, so they knew they had to come up with something. But they did not go back and ask what the basic aim of the whole text was. They did not think about the burden or ask why the Holy Spirit put that passage in the Bible. They should ask, “What was the wrong thing, the damaged aspect of our existence that the Holy Spirit wanted to deal with?” When you do application, you need to determine if you are still on point. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. You need to make sure that you are still on the main thing, the burden of the message. When you do application, you may come to the conclusion that you drifted. I often begin to tangentially think as I progress through the text. One thing might remind me of another, but I really did not deal with the Holy Spirit’s purpose for the text, which is the FCF. Application begins to focus the exposition.

Application also clarifies and gives meaning to exposition. That is harder to relate until you see it happening. Try and picture explanation, illustration, and application as the dominoes of understanding. I explain something, then I demonstrate it, and people really know it when they see its significance in their lives. Ultimately application tells people that they know it in their head and their heart, but now they need to do it. Then they really understand because they can apply it. We will see later on that these dominoes can fall in different orders. This is a very standard deductive order: principle, particular, application. Sometimes we will go the other way. We will go up the ladder. The point is not the order; it is that they all have to fall. For exposition you have to unfold the text and open the door so people can go and live it. All three have to fall so that you truly have exposition. That is all by way of theory.

Let me give you some texts that should affirm some of what we have been saying. First Thessalonians 2:7-12 tells us that application of truth is required in Scripture. It says, “But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. Surely you

remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” Paul says that they taught them the truth, they lived it among them, they tried to comfort them, and ultimately they encouraged them to live lives worthy of the Gospel. They wanted to see transformation. They wanted to see something changed in them. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The Scriptures principally teach what is doctrinally true, and they also teach us what we are doing wrong (reproof). They teach what we should do right (correction). And they instruct us in righteousness that we would be thoroughly furnished for all that God has called us to do. It teaches what is necessary to live the truth of God. Titus 2:1 says, “I urge you to teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.” Paul gives very explicit instruction for how people are to live. It is, after all, the pattern of all of the epistles. You get a salutation greeting at the beginning of the Pauline epistles, then you get doctrinal instruction, and then come the practical applications. There is a pattern. You might say you are only going to preach from the doctrinal part of the message, so do you still need to do application? If you really pressed me to the wall, I would tell you that technically you could do doctrinal instruction and wait until next week to get to the application portion. But it might take you several weeks to get that far in the text. Paul expected it to be done in one reading. The epistle was to be read in the church. He expected one to hear the doctrine and applications in one reading. We might not fulfill the aim of the apostle if, while preaching on the doctrinal sections, we might not get to the application portions for weeks and weeks. It would seem, to fulfill his ethic, we would make sure that application and doctrine stay wed.

If you think of how application occurs and how important it is, it is unlikely it can occur in a sentence. I want us to begin to think about the components of application. How is it made up, and what goes into it? There are four basic questions of application. When you hear them you will recognize that you cannot do this in one sentence. The four developmental questions include, first, “What should I do?” (instructional specificity). Application has specific instructions, which could be attitudinal or behavioral. We need to ask, “What does God now require of you as a consequence of the truth of this text?” The “what” question deals with instructional specificity.

The second question is “Where should I do it?” (situational specificity). This tells where the instructions apply. Give me the situations in which these instructions apply. We want to identify where in real life the principles apply. This carries significance because if I tell you what to do but you do not see where in your life it makes any difference, then I might as well not have told you what to do. It is not only what to do but what the situations are in your life where this will make a difference.

The third is the “why” question, which is the motivation. You need to give instructional specificity, situational specificity, and now proper motivation. “Why should I do that?” A lot of people in the Christian world do the Christian disciplines because they want to buy God off. “I will do this so God will not hurt me. I will pray more so He will not get mad at me.” They do the right things, but the motivation is wrong. I have turned God into the ogre in the sky. I have turned God into Satan; I have made them exchange places. I do a right thing for the wrong reason, which means it is wrong. So I want

to make sure that the motivation is correct in application.

Last, I want to deal with the “how” question, which is enablement. We need to explain not only what to do and where to do it but also why and how. “Why” is proper motivation. The “how” question is enablement. “You told me I have to do something, but I do not know how I am going to do that. I have struggled with this all my life. I failed yesterday; I just assume I will fail tomorrow. You told me to change, but how am I going to do that?” You need to tell people how to carry out God’s commands. This is part of application.

So the “what” question is instructional specificity, and the “where” question is situational specificity. This semester we will say that those two questions have to be answered in every main point. The “what” and the “where” has to be in the application of every main point. The “why” and the “how” must be answered somewhere in the sermon. We will not require them in every main point. But before our listeners walk out the door, we want to make sure that their motivation is correct and that we have enabled them to do what we have called them to do.

I will grant you that there is some artificiality in that. The reason I want to make sure that the “what” and the “why” are clearly stated is so that when we construct our explanation and illustration we have a target. We know that we will tell people to do something. We will exhort them as a consequence of the explanation and illustration. I well recognize that to say why and how in every main point may actually destroy the strategy either of your sermon or of the apostle. At times the apostle says to do several things, and then he says why to do it. At times it is far more powerful to save the “why” and the “how” for later portions of the sermon and to drive with the heart the instruction that you have already given to the hands. We will not forget the “how” and the “why.” Before the sermon is done, the “how” and the “why” need to be in there, but they may be saved for particular points. Every point needs to have the “what” and the “where.”

We go through these four application questions because we want to enable people to apply scriptural truths. There are several things that equip people to do what the Bible says. The first thing is adequate argument. People need to see the reasons for what they do. That falls into the explanation part of the sermon. The next part is having people properly motivated. That addresses not only what they think but what they feel about this text. Motivation falls under the illustration part of the sermon. The supreme purpose of illustration is not to clarify; it is to motivate. That does not mean there is no purpose in clarifying, but the supreme purpose of illustration is to motivate. If that is the case, the next thing that enables people to do what the Scripture says is realistic application. That tells people what to do, where to do it, why to do it, and how to do it. Realistic application has all four components of the application questions. Exposition is the fulcrum, and application is the thing to be moved. Argument, will, and praxis are the enablement features that make up application. Argument deals with the intellect, will deals with the motivation, and praxis brings it into our lives in practice. Then we will understand the application.

Let us talk about how application is structured, and then we will look at it in the text. In a traditional sermon, a main point statement gets us into the explanation. The explanation is typically divided into subpoints with key terms. Those explanation concepts and terms rain down into the illustrations. Those same key terms also rain down into the application. The subpoints’ key terms come down into the application, and they form the instructional specificity. We tell what the text means using parallel language with key word changes. Because we use these key word changes, when we do application, if we do not use those terms, we move away from our authority base. The use of those key terms is not only a rhetorical communication tool, but it is also my authority device. What I told you that text means

and the way I framed it is precisely what I am telling you the Bible says you should do. The reason you see that and feel the weight of it is because of the way in which I developed the explanation. The old rubric of preachers is you apply what you explained. In addition, you apply it how you explained it; you use its terms. The terms of explanation are what you apply as well. The explanation's key terms and concepts rain into the application.

But something else goes on as well. I also deal with situational specificity. I not only tell you what to do, but I also begin to think about where in your life this will make a difference. When I think of situations, it becomes a concrete application. I identify a concrete place in your life where this makes a difference. When you are in this situation, you should do what I just said. A lot of people will theologically begin to struggle here. They will say, "Wait a second. The Bible is meant for all kinds of people in all kinds of situations. You just limited it. Once you put a concrete there, did you not just limit the work of the Holy Spirit?" Persons who are very concerned about the *sola spiritus* perspective feel they have won their case. They think the Spirit alone is the One who should apply the Word. "I thought that if you begin to do application you limit the work of the Holy Spirit, and by you saying, 'Here concretely is where it makes a difference in your life,' you just confirmed my fear. You just fenced in the application of the Spirit." It is a legitimate concern, so we need to do something about it. Having identified the one concrete, we do not leave it there. We then unroll it. We say, "Now that you see the principle and how it applies in a concrete situation, consider the other situations in life that are typical among you in which this principle would also be applied." In other words, I put the concrete down to make people see how this has meaning in real life. But I do not fence it in by having spoken of the concrete. I will say, "Consider another situation," and another and another. The first concrete is the one most fully developed, but we break the fence down around it by saying, "Consider this and this and this..." I might say, "God demands integrity of you even if it is difficult. Some of you are in business situations where even your boss requires you to do what is not honest. I can remember a situation where my employer said, 'We brought you in at a starting wage, and we recognize that. So when you fill out your expense accounts, it is not always wrong to add a little bit to help your salary out a little.' My own boss told me to write down what was not true. But it does not matter what your business situation requires. God requires you to operate with integrity even if it makes life difficult for you. But not all of you are in business situations. Some of you are students in school..." I just broke down the fence there. "There is a lot of pressure to do well for the college that you want to get in to. Some of you even here want to do well because you think people in churches are going to look at your grade card to find out how well you did in order to hire you for a job. They hardly ever look at your transcript, though. They want to know who you are, and they want to hear from your heart what you know. But you can be under intense pressure to cheat in almost any academic situation."

I probably did more explanation of that than I would in a normal situation. I dealt with a business situation, I might deal with a school situation, and then I might open the horizon up. I might say, "There are other situations those of you here face that require your integrity. Even as I mention the issue of integrity, you know what they are." I really broke down the fence there. Now I said the Holy Spirit has to work in your heart to determine what this will mean. I give a concrete. The reason for the concrete is to specify where this has significance in real life. I do not limit it there though. I want to give other examples of where else it could apply.

For what it is worth, I will give you a little thought on the *sola spiritus* argument. On rare occasions, I will go to a conference, and people who have some exposure to *Christ-Centered Preaching* are concerned about the chapter on application. Almost always the concern is that it limits the work of the Holy Spirit. I ask them if they think that my instructing people to do application is wrong. They agree. I ask them if they think I should stop. They agree. I ask them if they think I should stop on the basis of

what the Scripture teaches. They agree again. “Did you not just do application? Do you hear it? Any time you say on the basis of a biblical principle you should stop doing something, you just did application. Even when you said, ‘You should not do application,’ that was application.” I know a fairly well known writer who objects to the use of illustration. So in a book on preaching he wrote, “I preached a wonderful funeral sermon one time, and I did not use a single illustration. The father of the girl who was killed came up afterward and said the sermon meant so much to him even though I did not use an illustration.” In saying that this author used an illustration to say it did not help to use illustrations! You will feel all the weight of that and theologically debate in other places what is right and wrong about application. Here is my thought. I want you to feel deeply what you want when you sit down at a sermon. If the pastor simply says, “God is sovereign,” then I would think what most of you would think, “I knew that before I sat down. It is not why I am here, pastor. I am here because I hope that you will show me the implications of that truth for my life, my family, my loved and lost ones. I was hoping that you would tell me where it makes a difference.” That is what application tries to do. It is the personal consequence of the principle. It is not always behaviors, and sometimes people tee off on application because they say, “You are just giving people behaviors.” But that is not what I have said. Application says what the significance for the heart is as well as for behaviors. In fact, the heart is more important than the behaviors, though not to be segregated from them. All these are to be done.

Let us look at how this unfolds in an actual message. We will look at a sermon that I gave you, specifically at main point two. My intention is to have you look first at the main point and the subpoints. Main point two is “Because God will judge sin, we must proclaim His Word to defend the truth.” The subpoints after the interrogatives are “When must we defend the truth? When others abandon sound doctrine. When must we also defend the truth? When others flock to false teachers.” The third subpoint is “When others will not listen.” Remember in the illustration we found with the Martin Luther account that those key terms reappeared. “Luther knew that others might abandon sound doctrine. Others had flocked to false teachers. He knew even in speaking that others would not even listen, yet he had to speak the truth.” Here is the interpreting statement at the end of the illustration: “You and I are called to a similar task in this day and age where truth is relative and tolerance encouraged.”

Candidly I wish he had done a little more to summarize the key terms preceding, but let us see where he goes from there. His application is this: “Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, who is a very young pastor in the city of Ephesus. Yet these words apply directly to us. Every day we are faced with challenges, and we must make a decision as to whether or not to defend the truth. In the business world there is pressure from every side to abandon doctrinally sound ethics as the old fashioned way of doing things.” Expository rain came down into that application statement. He used the key term “abandon sound doctrine” from the subpoint. It went through the illustration, and now they are being used here.

Now look at the situational specificity and the first concrete. He says the truth principle applies in the business world. Now it will be detailed a bit because the first concrete typically gets a little more detail to it. He says, “Whatever it takes is the slogan of the day. Whether dealing with money, the hiring and firing of employees, or company records, believers in the workplace often find themselves in situations where unethical behavior is not only overlooked but expected. In these situations, we must not succumb to our natural inclinations to follow the crowd and flock to those false teachers who claim such things are justifiable and will gain approval.” There is another drop of expository rain coming down, but it still deals with the same situation. He used the key terms of his explanation to deal with the business world twice. Now he says, “There are many things in this world more important than the favor of men, from the student who is encouraged by his peers to cheat on the big exam to the corporate executive who is offered a handsome bonus if she will look the other way with regard to the illegal business deal.”



A number of important things just happened there. The fence got broken down in a couple of ways. One of them is that we turned from the business world to school. Then another stereotype got broken down. The stereotype of the last generation is that men are the people in the business world. But he wanted us to think beyond our traditional categories and said in the business world “she” has been tempted in the same way. This does not just say that it is students or business people who deal with this. It says there is a whole spectrum of people from students to those in the business world who face this temptation. We picked up other categories by the means of expression. “How many heads would turn and mouths hang open if in these situations that person were to say, ‘I cannot do so because it would violate the Word of God.’ May you and I be motivated to say with Martin Luther, ‘My conscience is captive to the Word of God.’ With this as our motivation, we will be able to stand for truth even when others do not listen.”

There is a little more, but recognize that we have picked up the final raindrop of exposition. It is pointed not only to the exposition but also to the unrolled. It is pointed to the students, to the women in the business world, and to everybody in between in the way it was expressed. I often think about application in this way: we take the light of the Word, and the way in which I say, “This is what it means,” is by focusing the beam on a concrete situation. It is like those flashlights where you twist the top to turn them on and focus the beam on an object. I do enough twisting (specificity) and focus so that now you can see its significance in real life when you look at the concrete. Having focused the beam, I do not just keep pointing it at that situation. I say, “Those of you who are students and those of you who are young moms and are wrestling with kids...” I focus it and then I point to a few more places so that people see it does not just shine light there. It shines other places as well.

Truly I am concerned about the *sola spiritus* argument. I just do not buy that the best way to apply the work of the Spirit is not to mention where it applies. It is to give examples and then say, “And still you must deal with it in the way the Spirit speaks to you.” I want to make sure you see how this beam works in real life, even as you consider now how it should apply to your life. There will be times that I can be very specific about the concretes because I know what people in the congregation struggle with. I do not mention them by name, but I very well mention their situations. I do not say so much that I identify people. But you may deal with a whole church that is in unemployment crisis. I may have to say, “Those of us who are really struggling with where bread is going to come from tomorrow need to hear this word of God.” In saying that I speak to everyone in his or her situation.

As we end the discussion for this lesson, I want you to think of what is called the double-edged sword illustration. Some of you have pastors who are very experienced. I want you to listen with ears particularly tuned for something over the next few Sundays. Watch for how often very experienced preachers do not necessarily illustrate the explanation. They illustrate the application. They know the importance of having a concrete to the explanation. So they use their illustration to be the concrete of the application. The first concrete is not some abstract explanation of doctrinal truth. The illustration itself is of people who deal with that truth. The illustration itself is the concrete of the application. That saves you some time in application to say where else it might apply. I think you will find particularly in this generation of preachers and this generation of hearers that the ability to say, “Let me tell you about someone in your life whom you know, a real life that you can identify with who does apply this truth.” It makes it very powerful. It is a double-edged sword illustration. It both illustrates the explanation, and it is the concrete for the application. That is what gives it the double edge; it serves both purposes. It deals with the explanation and the application, but it actually illustrates the application to give concrete form to the explanation.

Next time we will talk conceptually and even with some particulars about what application involves. There is no question it is the breaking point of the sermon. When people say, “The people just stopped

preaching, and he went to meddling,” they mean that they do not think he had the authority or right to say what he did. “That may be his opinion, but I do not think it is what the Bible says.” People typically turn off in a sermon, not in the illustration or the explanation, but in the application. We need to face that hurdle and talk about how we as preachers deal with that reality. We will do that next time.

### **Application (continued)**

There were a few questions that came at the end of class last time that I thought were very apt questions. Let me review. An application-consistent outline is where you have the anchor clause as the application. “We should praise God because He is sovereign.” “We should praise God because He knows all things.” “We should praise God because He controls all things.” The “we should praise God” part stays the same, so you may think your application is very redundant in the main points. But your anchor clause will stay the same, and in the application you will develop the reason for that particular application. “We should praise God because He knows tomorrow.” When you develop the explanation of that particular main point, the magnet clause “He knows tomorrow” is not only what the explanation is about, but it is also the reason for that particular main point’s application. The part that changes is situational specificity. You will say, “Here is another reason that we should praise God: He knows all things.” Then you will say what situations in life that applies to. It may be about the college student who does not know where he is going next year. The situation will deal with the reason for the application. There will be a different reason on the next main point. “We should praise God because He controls all things.” We could say, “Even when the medical exam does not give the results that I wanted, still God knows and controls what is going on. I will still praise Him because I know that He is still in control.” The praise concept stays the same, but the reason for that application changes. You apply it differently to new situations. I have a new reason, and therefore there is another situation in which to consider this central application.

In an application-consistent outline, the part that really changes is not the core application but the reasons for it. You begin to see the impact of that when you say what situation the new reason applies to. How does it make a difference in other situations? Even if I still praise God, what is another reason to do it in this new situation? Here is where instructional specificity, the exposition of the subpoints, might seem very similar: we should praise God. The part that changes hugely is the situational specificity. You will give another situation that is affected by the new reason that I told you about. That is a very astute question. It means application-consistent outlines are typically about “whys.” Reason and motivation is typically what application-consistent outlines are about. Principle-consistent outlines are typically other things to do. They give more instruction instead of more reasons by their nature. The application changes in principle-consistent outlines, and the principle stays the same.

I was reminded of something that I did not say last time because we were moving quickly. Instructional specificity comes from the text exposition. If I say, “Here is the instruction,” and it is in the terms of my subpoints, I will end up applying what I explain. The instructions come out of the subpoints. That language and terminology comes down. That means that instructional specificity is supplied by the text. I say what the text means, the instructions come out of the text, and I use the words and the concepts of the text. Instructional specificity comes out of the text. Situational specificity comes from our experience. It might reflect something in the text, though. The people of Israel might have gone through something similar to the situations we face. The people of Israel certainly wondered what tomorrow would hold. The situational specificity could come out of the text, too, but it might be that now that I know the instruction, I need to exegete the text and the congregation. My experience with the congregation may often supply the situational specificity. Now that you know this truth, where in your life does it apply? You go in through the “who” door to find situational specificity. Now that I know this truth and I know my congregation, who needs to hear this? It is the standard pattern of the pastor who, actually or in his mind while preparing the sermon, sits at the table with the people in the congregation and says, “If I talked to you about this, what difference would it make in your life?” It moves it from the academic lecture to a sermon. That is situational specificity, because you describe the situations of the

people not the people themselves. What situations are they facing? I get to that place by asking, “Who needs to hear this?” It is the difference between the preacher who says abstract interesting things and the one who has the people at the end of the sermon asking, “How did you know what I was going through? Did you read my mail? How could you be speaking to me so clearly?” It is because it is not just preaching; it is pastoring at the same moment.

How can I help with what you are facing? My key thought, which I will repeat over and over again, is the most apt application comes when you take truth to struggle. Our tendency when we start preaching is to identify truths in the text and then start creating lists of behaviors. “You should do this. You should not do this. Go buy this book. Witness to your neighbor.” We create this list of things to do, which before you preached the sermon you had not even thought of. We create a list because we feel like we have to do application. Instead we should go in through the “who” door and ask what people are struggling with. How can I help them today? How can I be a shepherd to God’s people? What are they struggling with? I take the truth to the struggle. It will create a passion in you for preaching.

I remember when I was a senior in college and I told my best friend, who was a Jewish man, that I was going to go to seminary. He said, “Why would you do that? You do not like telling people what to do.” In his mind a preacher was someone who told other people things to do. In my mind preaching was about helping people. I do not want you to lose that ethic. That is probably why most of you are taking this course. You have a sense that you can help people. The Word of God has something to help them. Application can be about saying, “I have truth now. Where are people struggling that I can help them and not just put more burdens of behavior on them?” Instead of saying, “Here is something else for you to do,” we need to ask, “What are you struggling with, and what does the Word of God say will actually help?” Taking truth to struggle turns you from a lecturer to a pastor. It gives you a passion for your preaching and a joy in it. You will probably say that you love doing it because you can see how it helps people. It does not just burden them.

Let us pray together.

*Heavenly Father, we ask for Your blessing on this day. Even as we have talked here a little bit, we are your undershepherds. We ask that we would be made more effective pastors for Your people even by the way that we are taught to preach. We think about how we sit in the pews so longing for the preacher to say something that will enable us to better face the struggles, hurts, and difficulties that we deal with in our lives. We want to do it ourselves in accordance with the Word of God. Father, if we are able to help people face their struggles to be helped and healed by Your Word, then that is the great privilege and pleasure of our lives. Give us just a taste of it even as we talk about some of these technical aspects of application. Help us to sense what a difference Your Word can make and how we can help others through it. We ask Your aid and blessing in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

As we think about the importance of application, we are at the point of talking about what makes application difficult. One way to think about this is one of the more revealing surveys that was done about a decade ago. It was known as the Murdock Report, which was a very refined survey of Christian leaders in the Pacific Northwest in the United States. These were 800 leaders who were teachers or supporters of major evangelical colleges and seminaries in the Pacific Northwest. Obviously these were very informed people, because they either work in or support major evangelical institutions. It was interesting when the businessmen were surveyed and they were asked the question, “Do you know how the Bible applies to your ordinary business life?” Ninety percent said they did not know. Ninety percent of these very informed, highly involved Christian leaders said they did not know how the Bible applied to their ordinary business life. I want you to think of your position as a preacher talking to such people.

You want to say, “I want you this week to go and change your business practice in such a way that no longer are people taken advantage of. In fact, you should be willing to sacrifice profit, the bottom line, for the good of the people who work for you and the good of the people to whom you sell your product. I want you to go and change what you are doing, and I want you to do it all this week.” If you say that, you will run into anger! I did not say anything unbiblical: you should put people ahead of profit, and you should operate with integrity. But I will run into anger because the idea is to make money. People will say, “You do not understand what I have to accomplish. In fact, if I do not make money, I cannot employ the rest of the people. You do not understand what I am going through. I am angry at you now, and the credibility of your message is irrelevant. You are uninformed, arrogant, inexperienced, naïve, and do not understand my world.” All you thought you did was tell them what the Bible said.

We recognize that concrete applications have huge dangers in them. We talked before about what people remember out of sermons. We said they remember illustrations and then applications, but they typically remember most the applications that they most strongly disagree with. There are other problems that come up when I begin to come into their lives and tell them they have to change on my authority, which supposedly comes out of the Bible, though it does not seem like I know their world. The man may know he needs to be more Christian, but the instruction the pastor gave might have been a bad example that did not take into account the factors the business man must deal with. This brings us back to the Murdock Report, which says that 90% of the businessmen did not know how what the preacher says week-to-week applies to their situation. Sometimes we will get people to see the importance of application by asking them how they would want to be treated before we turn it to tell them how to treat others. That was Jesus’ strategy when He said to treat others as you want to be treated. There may be all kinds of false assumptions on the part of the preacher that he may suggest without even recognizing it. That could be a problem as well.

We have begun to recognize that application is full of landmines. We can see why preachers would just as soon not go there. It is very dangerous. Let us talk about what makes application difficult. First, it is difficult because of the thought required to be specific. We have already said that explanation is provided to you by the text. Application comes out of the preacher’s experience with the people. The Westminster Divines say, “One applies out of his residence and conversation with the people.” Living among them and conversing with them is the source of application. That does not mean it is the source of the instruction. What makes it real to people is that you really know them. People really appreciate it if you visit them in their workplaces. Young pastors sometimes do not recognize this. They are amazed that you care enough to come into their world and find out what they do and where they are. You might think you will bother them and you are out of place. And that can be true at times. But you need to pick your moments, and people love to see that their pastor is trying to find out what they deal with. We recognize the difficulty and the thought required to be specific.

The other reason that application is difficult is because of the courage required to be specific. We know that if we get it wrong, rejection is a very real and present danger. So the tendency is just to stay in abstraction. If you just give principles, it is not dangerous. J. Daniel Bowman, in his book on preaching, gives a solution to this, which I hope you will disagree with. He says, “What is it that causes sermons to be ineffective? One result of recent studies was that sermons that contained applications to the daily lives of the congregation were the sermons that were unanimously rejected by the congregation.” It said that application to daily lives results in widespread rejection. “The frequency of rejection and the intensity of rejection exactly paralleled the amount of daily application. I would suggest that individuals are becoming more and more reluctant to accept application, religious or otherwise. That kind of prescription implies that one is in a position to tell others what they should do.” Therefore Bowman advises not to do application. As though we are in a position to tell other people what to do! But we do

speak with the authority of the Word of God. So now we have to ask if we proved that the principles and instructions we gave are in the text.

Begin now to feel the weight of terminological and conceptual consistency. Have I said this is what the Bible says and begun to do application using the terms that I proved were in the text? If they are not there, my authority base is a long way away. One of the reasons that I will do that summarizing and consistency is just to make sure that people are able to overcome “the breaking point.” The breaking point is this: in exposition I go through the explanation of the sermon and say, “This is what the Bible says...” Everyone can nod and say, “That is very interesting.” Then I can go on and tell an interesting illustration. Everyone nods again. Now I say, “As a consequence of that, you must change. In fact, this was the goal of the sermon, not just to inform you but to transform you. You must change.” It is that typical transition in a classical traditional sermon from illustration to application that is the breaking point. It is where people, in silly terms, say, “He has stopped preaching and gone to meddling.” In real terms this is the place of rejection. It was easy to say and to hear everything to this point. But now you begin to say, “With the authority of the Word of God, I must call you to repentance, correction, reproof, or encouragement. Ultimately you need to change.” This is the place where it gets dangerous, and we know that there is very real possibility of rejection.

Let us talk about how to overcome the breaking point. I have already given you my best advice: take truth to struggle. If that is your overall goal, then it is even your good intent that means so much to people. If you seek to help, it will override some of the errors that you may have in application. If it is truth to struggle, it will avoid both lists and legalisms, and it will truly make you a pastor. As we take truth to struggle, first, we need to offer a conclusive argument. The reason that you must do this is because I have shown conclusively that it is what the Bible says. “I can show you conclusively in the Scripture that it is not okay to cheat people in order to make a profit. If that is what you are doing, I can show you the absolute argument that what you are doing is wrong.” You can often do this. The Bible says, “Thou shalt not steal,” so if you operate without integrity in order to make money, I will say, “You cannot do that. The Bible says you shall not steal.”

Now we have a problem, though. The old rubric is a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still. Someone may say, “You convinced me that what I am doing is wrong.” But I still have a problem. Those of you in pastoral training basically know what is right and wrong to do, but you still sin. The knowledge of what is wrong is not the final word in terms of being able to see transformation in people’s lives. While we say it is our pastoral and exegetical obligation to say, “This is what the text says, and it has implication on your practice,” it is not the last thing to do. We offer a conclusive argument, but that is not the end.

Another thing that we might do to overcome the breaking point is use illustration to disarm hostility. In the Bible, Jesus and others would speak on a difficult subject but tell a story about it first. Nathan told a story about a man who had a very sweet sheep that he loved. Someone else who was richer and more powerful took it away. David wanted judgment on that person, but Nathan says, “You are the man. This is what you have done in taking another man’s wife.” It was a way to get people to agree to the principles through a story before applying the story.

I was with a group of pastors last night who have done some surveys in Christian colleges, though they did not talk to only Christian kids. A recent survey asked young Christian people how many of the friends that they have of college age sleep with people who are not their spouses. The answer was 90%. Even if people did not feel that they were involved in promiscuity, their impression of their friends was that 90% were sleeping around. If you are a pastor to young people in a church today, and the first words

out of your mouth are, “You should not sleep around,” 90% of the people listening just tuned you out. Instead, you could deal with it by telling what will happen statistically to young people who sleep around in terms of their future marriages. “We know the incidence of divorce among those who live together prior to marriage is roughly triple that of those who do not live together. The saying is ‘We will just try it out for a while, and then we will get married.’ It sounds reasonable. But is it not strange today that what sounds reasonable does not seem to work out? Those people who experiment with marriage before they get married actually end up getting divorced at three times the rate of those who do not live together before marriage. Did you know that the Bible addresses this and has some instruction for us that might be helpful? If you are struggling with what is right for you, let us see what the Bible says, because it tries to help us with what we recognize about relationships coming undone.” Tell me the difference in tonality. One takes a statistical viewpoint and says, “Something is wrong here. We all recognize it,” and goes through the account of what is happening in society today. The other preacher first gives the principle and says, “This is wrong; just do not do it.” The one who tells a story is actually trying to help. I am not saying that is the only way to go about it, but it is a strategy. It is a strategy that uses a statistic, an illustration, or something else that presents the principle first. That way people agree to the principle before proving it is in the Bible.

Another thing that helps overcome the breaking point is to make sensible proposals. There are typically three categories of things that are not sensible. One category is “pie in the sky” principles, which are almost silly abstractions. “Because God calls you to love your neighbor, I want you to go to your neighbor this week and smile at him for at least five minutes. I want him to see the love of Jesus in you. Just go and smile in front of him.” Get real! This pie in the sky notion of smiling more every day and loving you neighbor like you never did before does not work. You could actually say there is biblical principle behind some of that, but there is really a certain naïveté that will not help.

The opposite category is what I call high hurdles. You tell people to do something, though you do not realize what their lives are really like. “If you really want to study the Bible with me in these next few sermons that I go through, I want you to show up on Tuesday nights. We will have a Greek class together, and that way you will really understand the passage.” It might be a good idea, but how many are going to show up for the Greek class? ‘

The third category of things that are not sensible is naïve expectations. The classic example of this is the pastor who stands in the pulpit and says, “Go buy this book. It was really helpful to me, so I think you should go buy this book.” Probably only a minor percentage of the people will remember the name of the book by the end of the sermon. Of those who remember the name of the book, even fewer will get into the car during the week, go down to the local Christian bookstore, put their money on the counter, and take the book home and read it. If you really want people to read the book, you better provide free samples or excerpts of it in the foyer as people leave.

You have to deal with where people really are. You might tell the businessman, “Change your business practice,” but what does that mean? How could you actually begin to help someone who you think may be using business practices that are unethical or unbiblical? His whole business, his livelihood, his family’s livelihood, the livelihood of the people who work for him, his pension, and his kids’ college education all depend on his business practice. If you are going to have someone change, you had better say more than just that they should change. In the course of your sermon you might want to say, “People who are really struggling with this, I recognize that I might not have faced all the things that you are facing. Would you come and talk to me? Let us talk it through and think about what you have to think through. I may not have faced all the issues that you have.” I even confess my naïveté. “Is there someone here who can help you? Let me put you in contact with some businessmen who face similar

things.” Rather than failing to help people, we want to give them the help that they need. This takes serious thinking as a pastor. I can try to live in your life and think about where I would need help if I were in your position. I give you principles, but I do application that takes into account what you must deal with.

The next way to overcome the breaking point is to fit the tone to the task. An old preacher-ism says, “Accusations harden the will. Questions prick the conscience.” We must not just stand in the pulpit and rant at people for not being as good as they ought to be. We might pick on young people for promiscuity, businesspeople for lack of compassion, and wives for not properly caring for their children. If all we do weekly is rant, you can just watch people’s demeanor fade. I preach in a lot of different churches. Sadly, I can even tell when I get up in the pulpit if people are accustomed to being beaten with the Word or helped by it. People accustomed to being beaten with the Word almost immediately glaze over and drop their heads when I start talking. They are accustomed to being hurt by the preaching. People who are accustomed to being helped by the preaching look up expectantly. They think, “I need this.” It does not mean that they are unwilling to be pricked in the conscience.

One of the mistakes that young preachers make is to think that people do not want to be challenged. Those in whom the Spirit is alive do want to be challenged. They actually want to know how to change. They know it is hard and it is a struggle, but those in whom the Spirit is working want to love Jesus. They want their lives to glorify Him, and they actually want to be challenged. They want it to be credible and compassionate, they want it to be with the authority of Scripture, and they want solid things that they can actually do that are realistic. But the people of God really want to be challenged. I can say the hardest things to people if they believe that I am concerned about their good. Watch pastors when they really love their congregations. They can say, “I know this will hurt, but you have to change.” Watch the smile as they say the hardest things while saying, “I love you still, but this will hurt you and hurt us if change does not occur.”

On the other hand, a preacher could rant and just go after people with the authority of the Word of God. That ultimately destroys ministries rather than helps them. Think of some of these possibilities: “Now you know the Word of God says he is already with the Lord, therefore I do not want you to grieve without hope.” Is that going to help? The words are true, but the tone does not fit the task. To help people who grieve, the Bible commands us to bring comfort. It is not just comfort with the truth of the Word; it is giving the Word correctly even in our tone. Our tone needs to fit our task. A preacher might gruffly say, “What this congregation needs is more love for one another.” But his tone does not match the task, so it is not received well.

The opposite might happen, too. A preacher could timidly say, “Listen, I know what you need to do, and I will speak to you with the authority of the Word of God. You really should change...” But you do not need to back up or apologize up front for what you say. There are times to say, “The gossip in this church is tearing us apart, and if it does not stop, the session is going to act on it or we will die. It has got to stop.” With courage, force, and the authority of the Word of God, you can say what has to be said. It may be loving, and it is for love’s purposes, but sometimes it has to be forceful.

Let us talk about how we know when we are too rough or too timid. There are some verses that deal with the gentleness of pastoral conversation. Second Timothy 2:24-26 says, “The man of God must not quarrel. He must gently instruct those who oppose him.” We as seminarians just love to debate about very minor things at times and get very mad at one another for not holding to our particular position. Second Timothy 4:2 says, “Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.” I know what it means to encourage with great patience and careful instruction, but I do not know what it



means to rebuke in the same manner. I typically think that to rebuke is the old “one-two punch.” Some sin can be changed in a conversation, and some sin changes over a generation. That is a very tough thing.

I worked in a pastoral situation in which a large segment of the community and some of the leaders of my church were employed in publishing. That particular publisher produced a large amount of pornography. This had gone on for a generation and a half. I will tell you it was the hardest period of my pastoral life to know how to deal with men who were leaders in my church who stood on the line when pornography is produced. Their lives, their pensions, and their families were at stake. They quickly said that it was not what they worked on most of the time. It just came through on occasion. But I had to think about what the Word of God said and how it applied to this situation. How can I lead God’s people if this is what I put my hand to? Am I going to be fired when I talk about this? I actually had my wife call my in-laws and say, “We may have to come live with you,” because we thought we might lose our job when we found out what was going on. We had been lied to going into the situation. We had been told it was not happening. We had only been there about six weeks when we found out this was still going on. What would you do? The Bible talks about the good shepherd versus the hireling. When the wolf comes, the hireling runs away. He did not need to deal with it; they were not his sheep. But the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. How gently, compassionately, and patiently do I have to deal with this if I really care about you?

The last verse is 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12, “We could have been a burden to you but we were gentle among you as a mother nursing her baby.” There are also verses about when we should be more forceful. Titus 1:10-13 says, “Talkers and deceivers rebuke sharply.” Titus 2:15 says, “Encourage and rebuke with all authority.” We have just said on one side is gentleness and patience and on the other side is to rebuke and show the wrath of God against all ungodliness. Both are the right things to do. And you know what to do when based on pastoral prudence. The goal is to preach and live in the community with the authority of the Word of God so as to see the transformation of the Word of God. Calvin, in Book II, chapter 12 of the *Institutes*, talks about what he faced in French Switzerland, which was large-scale drunkenness. He actually advised people not to undergo church discipline. He said, “We must pastorally deal with this, because if we disciplined everyone, the churches would empty.” He had a right to discipline, but it was a longer-term problem that caused them to deal with the heart over time. He did not want to drive the people of God away from where there could be help. We are the help; we have to consider what needs to be done so the congregation can continue to receive it. Fitting the tone to the task is an important guideline that has many dimensions of pastoral understanding.

An even harder guideline in overcoming the breaking point is to provide sufficient guidance for adults to make their own decisions. Nothing creates spiritual babies as much as pastors who will make all the decisions for the people. There are not only pastors or churches, but sometimes there are entire movements in which the goal is to tell everyone what to think and do every moment of the day. You create automatons who, apart from that instruction, do not have the ability to stand. We see this most in our lives today when young people go to college. People have been raised in Christian homes, they have been under Christian preaching and teaching, and they go to college where it is no holds barred for them. Often that is because we have taught Christian young people everything they ought to do and put such controls on them that they have never made their own decisions. As a parent of teens, it is extremely hard to know what to do. When do I encourage you to gain the strength to stand and step back so that you will stand on your own feet?

We see this in the Bible, too. In the book of Philemon, the apostle Paul says, “I could command you to take Onesimus back but instead I appeal to you on the basis of love.” Receive him. He is a slave, which

was a big deal in that society. Paul could have commanded Philemon, but he had to figure it out on his own. “I entreat you, I urge you, but you deal with it.” More telling are the letters between 1 and 2 Corinthians. By 2 Corinthians 2, Paul said, “I would have come to you earlier...” In 1 Corinthians, a man lives with his father’s wife. Paul writes and tells them to take care of it and deal with it. By the second letter he says, “I would have come to you earlier, but if I had come to you earlier I would have had to be harsh. So I put it off so you would take care of it.” He basically said, “You have to grow up and deal with some of the difficult sins.” He gave them the tools to handle the problem and told them what was right and wrong. He gave them the principles to handle the situation and even told them where the principles apply. There was a man living with his father’s wife, such evil was not even done among the pagans. Now they knew the principles and the situations to which it applied, but he left it to them to apply it. Sometimes we have to say, “Here is the application.” Sometimes you say, “Here are the principles, and here is the situation. You are a businessperson, and I do not know how to apply this. You will have to apply it.”

When I pastored one church, we had a lot of educators, both the administration and the teachers of the local school district, in our church. We had the supervisor of the school, the principal of two of the local schools, and many teachers in our church. About every three years there was a teachers’ strike. What if the pastor came in and tried to say, “Here is what you should do...”? I did not have the expertise. I did not know how they should vote on paragraph 2, section 3, sub-item A in the union contract. But I could tell them, “Those of you who are on the picket line, there will be some people who will say some pretty ugly things to people who come and go. I cannot tell you whether it is right or wrong for you to go on strike. But I can tell you how you have to address Christian brothers and sisters. You are not allowed to speak with hatred toward those who are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You can differ with them, and there may be things you have to work through, but there are certain principles here that you must still follow. Those of you who are in administration, are you being fair? Are you being just? I can call you to those principles, but you must apply them.” Sometimes I have to say, “Here are the principles, but you must apply them. I actually do not know how to apply them, because it is beyond my expertise.”

Another way to overcome the breaking point is called “the big other.” This is how to do application and help them without making them switch off. The biggest one is to remember the difference between a good idea and a scriptural mandate. The church typically goes to war when the preacher has a good idea and says it is a biblical mandate. It may be a very good idea, but if you say it is now a command, you have become the law of God and transgressed Scripture. Beyond that there is typically great trouble in the church.

Let me give you some examples. “You must regularly feed on the Word of God so that it becomes a part of your life and existence.” That is a command. “You must have a 20-minute devotional every day. You must have a quiet time.” That is merely a good idea, though you may have people in your life who taught it as a mandate. When you did not obey their mandate, you may have felt you had failed God. Then later in life when you begin to practice the good idea as a mandate, you are actually bribing God with your prayer so He will not get mad at you. Instead of feeding on the Word, you feed God with your good behavior so that He will honor you. When you take good ideas and make them mandates, you do not just create legalism, but you make God and Satan exchange places. That is one of the reasons the church goes to war. It fights on foreign ground when we begin to turn good ideas into scriptural mandates.

Here is another example, “Do not mention past sexual sin in a sermon.” That is a good idea, but some have made it a mandate. I cannot point you to a Scripture that says that, though there are Scriptures that point to leaders of God’s people who deal with sexual sin. It deals with our culture, and I may have all

kinds of cautions and warnings. But I cannot make it a scriptural command. It is a good idea to weigh, but ultimately you must weigh it. Think about this, “You must consider the effects of your words and examples on the culture to which you speak.” That is a mandate; you are required by the Word of God to consider those more highly than yourselves to whom you minister. You are required to consider the culture in which you exist and not just do what pleases or does not please you. This next example is even harder, “You should raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” That is a command. “You should send your children to Christian schools.” That is a good idea, though even here at seminary we are divided on it.

Most of my pastoral experience was through the 1980s. There were different movements that came along during that time. When I first began to minister, the Christian schooling movement came on board strongly in the part of the country that I was in. We had people who meant well but, sadly, would stand up in the church and say, “If you leave your children in the public schools, you are giving them to the devil. You are simply cooperating with Satan if you do not put your children in Christian schools.” That was a great way to have congregational meetings! It was not calm waters. After that, people were not prepared for the next movement that came along toward the end of the 1980s, which was not Christian schooling but home schooling. We had the very people who thought they had the holy high ground, which was Christian schooling, who now were told, “You mean you would put your children with other children to socialize? Do you not know that the Christian family is the place that education is to occur? Do you not remember that it is the fathers and the mothers who were given the charge to teach their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?” Suddenly those who thought they were on the high ground found that there was higher ground. Then through the mid 1990s, another movement came along for schooling. After the home school movement, the classical school movement came. “You mean you are willing to use a curriculum that was produced by Bob Jones University or other people who are unreformed and follow the enlightenment categories and do not really recognize that the Trivium is the basis of all education? It even has its roots in Scripture. Do you not recognize that we have to socialize our children together according to a classical model that God Himself has endorsed? Even Paul knew the Trivium, and you will not follow it?” The movement goes on. It is a command that you must raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but there may be various ways to apply that.

When we begin to exegete the culture as parents and pastors, we may say there are enough huge problems in the public school systems that we have to find alternatives. But to make an alternative a command, we go too far. Instead we can woo someone to the goodness and wisdom of what we advocate. We can tell someone why in our culture it would be good for them and their kids to follow an alternative. It is very different than saying, “With the authority of the Word of God, I can tell you that you must...” When you move it to command status, the church will go to war and divide. It is right for it to divide, because we have created a new law and made man the lawgiver.

The last example is “You must never go to an R-rated movie.” This is only a good idea. “You may not partake of anything that causes lust in your heart.” That is a command, though many in our culture do not recognize it. As a preacher it is very hard to preach it. In Calvin’s time the problem was a culture that was caught up in alcohol addiction. We now have a culture that is caught up in sexual addiction at various levels. Even we find it hard to remove ourselves from the addictions or to confront other people with it. We have to be very careful. We can struggle with the addiction so much ourselves that we begin to speak in terms where we move good idea to command. At that point we destroy our credibility and become new lawgivers. On the other hand, we can be so concerned about legalism that we then do not say what the Word of God says for fear of offending people and having to change ourselves. That becomes the great misery and joy of preaching.

Application is about saying to myself as well as to others how the Word of God applies. Ultimately what keeps us from being willing to apply the Word to others is the fear of applying it to ourselves. What does the Word of God require of me? I have looked at it, studied it, and read it. The thing that can keep me safe from having to change is to keep it up in the principle world. Instead we need to say how the principle applies in my life. Once I begin to have the courage to apply it to my life, I begin to understand more and more how I have to speak to others for their good as well as the means by which I can do that. As a result, we pray a lot for spiritual guidance and pastoral prudence. I know of no preacher who says it like the Westminster Divines talked about application. They said, "The preacher must not rest in general doctrine but, how much it may pain him, must move to application." It is interesting that they recognize that application can be such a pain. It is not enough for the preacher to rest in general doctrine. He must move to the pain of application, because his goal is transformation. How can I help you? How can we deal with this hurt in your life with what the Word of God says?

Whenever you use cultural statistics, it is important to say where they came from. If you say something like I said about divorce in a church setting, everyone would nod and agree. But when you are in a secular setting, you really need a foundation for those statistics. If I used those kinds of statistics in a secular setting, I would probably cite the source particularly. It goes back to what we mentioned earlier. When we use illustrations, we typically do not cite source citation in a sermon unless we need it for the authority of it. It is not a research paper. I would think in a secular situation you would definitely need the authority of the source of your statistics.

We have recognized that the ways we overcome the breaking point are important for doing application. Let me make some final major cautions for applications. The main caution is that applications without authority are very dangerous and damaging to the sermon and the pastor. When we say they have to have authority, we need to be able to show where it is in the text. This is where that application is in the text. The principle is here. We are doing classical expository sermons in this course, and your main points and subpoints need to be from the text. Now you begin seeing that the technical aspect is not the real issue. You need to have the authority for the application you make. That becomes the essential issue. You need to have authority for what you say, and you need to show that you can say it with authority.

There are tools to make sure the listeners see that there is authority for what you say. That is expositional rain, which uses the concepts and terms that you develop in the explanation. You said what the text says and means. You use concepts and terms in the explanation. They need to reappear in the application. That is the way that you maintain authority and show that it is not just you but the text that says it. It will quickly raise flags in your own mind when you begin to transgress the line from a biblical mandate and a good suggestion. If you cannot point out where it says something, it might be just a good idea.

It is not wrong to give suggestions for a mandate in a sermon. It can be a very good idea. "One way that you can regularly feed on the Word of God is the daily discipline of a devotional. Christians have done that throughout the centuries. They recognize the power of a disciplined devotional period in their daily lives." I can very much encourage you to feed on the Word of God (the command) by a good suggestion. I just need to make sure that you know the difference between the suggestion and the command. "Here is a suggestion on how you might carry this out." When I say the suggestion is the command, then it becomes a problem. Preachers actually help at times by saying, "Knowing what you struggle with and deal with, let me give you some suggestions."

The suggestion may not come with the same authority as the command. It may come out of the

preacher's experience. Some of us know that you can feed on the Word of God by having regular devotionals. We may even point out people in the Bible who seem to have regular time with God, like Daniel. "Here is regular time with God being practiced by an Old Testament man of God. Here we see Jesus frequently retreating to a quiet place to commune with God." We see people following a suggestion even though it is not a command for daily use.

Another caution that we have mentioned already is not to make applications beyond the minister's expertise. Should you vote for the union contract or not? The preacher may not have the expertise to answer that, so it might be necessary instead to talk about principles. The final caution is not to make applications unrelated to the fallen condition focus (FCF). An application may be true, good, and even a good idea, but is it what the sermon is about? Does this still deal with the burden of the message? There needs to be a tie back when you look at your application and see if it deals with what you said is the burden of the message. You might be on another topic. "As I was preparing this message, I thought of something wonderful that you should do." Does it deal with the FCF? Sermons will come together, and you will go deeper and deeper into people's lives if you have a focus that you come back to. The application needs to be related to the FCF.

Let me go over some proper attitudes for application. Application needs to be right between the eyes with love. In preaching I often say, "You said that we should honor one another in our marriages. What did you mean by that?" You meant that we should not talk about each other behind our back to people who are neighbors, but you did not say it. Instead you said something general that was safe, did not get you in trouble, and did not offend anyone. Say what you thought, even if it offends someone. It is your job to offend them with the Word of God if you do it out of love. The very reason you stood up and addressed people from the Word was because you wanted to bring the transformation of the Word of God into their lives. If you back away from it now, you will not do what needs to be done. Say exactly what you should say, and do it out of a heart of love now that you have examined the Word in light of the people who are here.

That requires a second attitude, which is strong, steady, and forgiving. It is almost a cliché that older preachers move to abstraction and younger preachers move to anger. The older preacher who has preached and not seen people change or seen fruit may feel like every time he does application, it gets him in trouble. He can typically move to abstraction and safety. The counter of that is young men in the pulpit who are almost the stereotypical angry young man. "You did not do it. I told you to do it, but you did not do it. So you need to do it!" We get angrier and angrier over time because people do not do what we tell them to do. You will not be able to preach long term if you cannot get up in the pulpit, speak strong to the people the Word of God, watch them not obey, forgive them, and speak again. If you really cannot forgive them when they fail to honor you, you will burn out. Those who study pastoral burnout tell us that it is not primarily a feature of fatigue or too much work. It is a lot of work, but you will find out that the pastorate can be a place for lazy people to hide. You can just go to your study and find all kinds of reasons not to do things. But if you are a conscientious preacher, the work is never done. You are the 24/7 guy. You are always on call, work never done, people to see, sermons to write, and counseling to be done. It is more than any person could do. Fatigue typically is not the cause of burnout. It is fatigue combined with anger. "They are so unfair to me. They do not honor me. They do not do what I say." Anger ultimately becomes the corrosion in your own heart that drives you from the pulpit. Strong, steady, and forgiving all must be there for there to be pastoral consistency.

The last thing under proper attitudes is to motivate with love for Christ. This means that we typically try to motivate people *from* acceptance, not *for* acceptance. Some of you have had this and have been in those churches where there is actually a form of pastoral abuse. It says, "I will love you, and you will

have my approval if you do all the things that I say.” The pastor who stands in as ambassador for Christ seems to be saying that Christ loves you because of what you do. The truth is that Christ loves you because of what He did. Our great motivation in application is to motivate people from acceptance, not for it. “God has done this for you, in Christ. You are clothed in His righteousness. He has made a way and intercedes. In your weakness He is strong. Despite your sin, He is the One Who provided His blood.” People need to be motivated out of love for Christ from acceptance rather than told, “Straighten up, and then you will be okay with God.” If people are told, “Straighten up, and then you will be okay with God,” they will never be okay with God. They will never straighten up enough because of “the great disproportion between our best works and God’s true holiness,” as the Westminster Divines say. Not only do our good works not earn God’s affection, but they actually deserve His reproof. If I tell people, “Just do more good works; give God some more filthy rags, and He will be happy with you,” I create a God who can never be satisfied. I weaken the hearts of God’s people and ultimately drive them to despair. Motivate out of love for God. His acceptance is what drives their motivation for holiness rather than saying, “Become holy, and then God will love you.” They will never be that holy.

Let me go over some key hints for preparing application. First, plan for specific people; pick on no one. Specificity basically comes because we talk about their situations. It is why you cannot be a great preacher if you just sit in your study. In the Westminster Divines’ language, you need to be “in residence and conversation with your people.” Are you among them so that you are now able to plan with specificity in your sermon? Do not name people, but deal with where their lives are. This means that we exegete the people as well as the text. It is also important to remember all four questions of application. Two questions have to be in every main point: what do I do, and where do I do it? The “what” comes out of the explanation, and the “where” comes from knowing people and what they deal with. Within the body of the sermon before the people walk out the door, we want to know why and how. That will be in the text or its context. You need to address the “why” and “how” in addition to the “what” and “where.”

Let me make some final words on application. You want to develop an early burden for a lasting passion. We have dealt with the nuts and bolts of preaching and putting together sermons of a traditional message. We said that the FCF should be in your introduction. We began to look at sermons and underlined the key points so that we know they are there. We have done all these technical things, and we do expositional rain, using the key terms in our illustrations and applications. Ultimately I do not care! I want to know if you care about God’s people. Have you even in the introduction said, “Here is something you are struggling with. I know it. God knows it, and He is here to help you. He provided His Word for that.” If, from the very beginning, you preach with a burden for God’s people, you will love to preach. You will love it. You will say, “I have something to say that will really help people here today.” If you develop that early burden, this moves away from an academic exercise, just checking off the boxes of a traditional sermon, and you will actually begin to feel that you are doing something as the Good Shepherd would have you do. You are helping people! That is the joy of preaching. That is the profound joy of preaching, when you say, “Here is a burden that I can help with.” When you preach that way, now application is not just a scary minefield. It is actually the great joy. I can talk about where people hurt, and I can help them. That is the lasting passion of preaching, when you have a burden and the Holy Spirit gave you something to say. You can help. When you preach that way, it will be your lasting passion, and you will be a great help to God’s people.

## **Transitions & Dialogical Method**

Let me review a bit before we start today's lesson. First, application is the main thing to be done in an expository sermon, according to Broadus. We broke down application to four components: instructional specificity, situational specificity, motivation, and enablement. Instructional specificity is about what to do, and situational specificity is about where to do it. Relevant, realistic, and achievable are some key characteristics of the commonsensical applications. A key distinction should be kept in mind when making concrete applications. You need to know the difference between a good idea and a biblical mandate. The church goes to war when you make mandates out of good ideas. Last, you get the terms for instructional specificity from the key terms of the subpoints. If you do not have subpoints, these key terms come from the magnet clause of the main point.

Let me remind you of where we are in the course of preparing a sermon. We have gone over the overall structure of the whole message. We did introduction, proposition, main points, and the components of explanation. We looked at how the subpoints typically divide the explanation component. We talked about illustration and application, and we recognize it gets repeated in another main point or two prior to the conclusion. Let us pray together.

*Father, we get to the point now of proclaiming Your Word to each other. We ask for You to give us Your Spirit. We recognize that we can make it very artificial. Certainly there are those in our world who view every church experience as artificial and performance. We can ourselves change that by coming to minister to Your people with Your Word, believing that You are present in Your Word and that You will truly minister even as we speak by Your Spirit. When we say that the Word of God preached still is the Word of God, we think what we come to do, even in devotional times, has heavenly weight. So we ask for You to give us a sense of seriousness as well as joy in what You give us to do. Grant us a sense of privilege, we pray, that we might honor You rightly. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Today we will talk about some of the glue that puts these messages together. The goal this lesson is to understand how sermon components and listener dialogue are knit together through the use of effective transitions and "pulpit dialogue." That is a very fancy way of talking about the glue that holds a sermon together. We have talked about the components: explanation, illustration, application, proposition, main point, subpoints, and conclusion. We have talked about all these pieces; now let us let us talk about what ties them together. This is a lesson on transitions. But they can make messages logical and listenable to people, and that is our goal.

Let us think of the function of transitions before we get into the details. The function of transitions is to make our messages artistically listenable and logically connected. The sermon needs to have some flow to it. If you look at it visually, you already know a lot about how to do this. We have talked about what happens at these different nodes in the double helix. We know we start with a main point statement, and typically at the end of explanation before we get into the illustration we have some sort of summary. We know at the end of the illustration there is another summary that happens. This interpreting statement is also preparation for the application. The proposition said what the rest of the sermon is about. That is one node that comes at the end of the introduction. The main point is a summary that prepares for explanation. Then there is another summary, an illustration, a summary, application, and a transition before the next main point. You can begin to see that this main point will sound a lot like the summary. The summary at the end of the explanation will probably sound a lot like the interpreting statement summary at the end of the illustration. There are these places where there are reflections of main ideas that do two things. They remind us of what has come before, and they prepare for what will follow.

They review and preview. That is what illustrations do. Do not forget the double helix. Each node in whichever order the components appear is a summary of what preceded and a thematic statement of what will follow. Transition is made easier by remembering that what you illustrate or apply is always the last thing you said in the preceding material. Components are tied, therefore, by the parallel concepts and terminology that connect them. Summaries do not only conceptually remind where we have been, but they also terminologically pull the strings together again so that we are ready for what will follow.

Let us think about the nature of transition. The process by which main point components are tied together conveys the more general nature of transitions within and between main points. Main points have transitions within and also between. The basic definition is that transitions demonstrate or develop the relationships of the parts to the whole or the parts to other parts. Transitions may relate the introduction to the body of the message. This is the proposition, which is a form of transition. You are far enough along that I hope you have discovered something else. The proposition is a combination of principle plus application. We said that the key terms of both clauses of the proposition (principle and application) will appear in the introduction. That was a mechanical thing to do. But I hope that you have begun to see that this introduction actually illustrates the relationship of the principle and application. It does not just illustrate the principle or the application. Typically the introduction illustrates how these two things play off of one another. The introduction shows the relationship of the principle and application.

For a while we told ourselves just to get the terms in there. But we were really forcing ourselves to make a relationship between these clauses. We really illustrate the relationship of the principle and application in the introduction. That means, in a sense, even the introduction was glue. It got principle and application tied together conceptually by the illustration that was being used. The introduction is tied to the body of the sermon by transition. The proposition is tied to the first main point, often with a question. That is another way that we use transition. We talked about the concept of interrogating the proposition. We make a strong statement, "Because Christ is our salvation we should proclaim Him. How do we go about doing that? How do we proclaim Him? Because He is our salvation, we proclaim Him to difficult people." Often we ask a question after the proposition as the form of getting into the first main point. We will also use transitions to relate main points to each other, and we will use transitions to tie the components of main points to each other. We will use transitions to tie the body of the message to the conclusion. We look at all the parts and see that transitions hook these things together. We use transitions because careful transitions help the listener follow the speaker's thought throughout the progress of the message.

Now let us talk about how transitions are used. Transitions may review where we have been and preview where we are going. These are the main functions of illustrations: review and preview. Transitions may relate an immediate matter to the overall theme, which we will call "tiebacks." I tie back where I am immediately to the overall purpose and flow of the message. A transition may also interest the listener in a new thought or the relationship between thoughts. This is more the preview side of transitions, which we will call "billboards." Billboards point out what is ahead. A tieback goes back to what was before. It reminds us of what things were overall. But a billboard tells us what is ahead.

Last, a transition can be any combination of the above. As you begin to put together a sermon, you will begin to see something. If you look at it in the abstract, you will see that you have a main point statement that goes right into explanation. In your outline, you will have a main point immediately followed by your first subpoint. But that is not the way we talk. There will typically be a sentence or two of transition before you get to the first subpoint. It will say, "Why am I dealing with that? How do we begin to understand how this will unfold?" We do not just preach like an encyclopedia, saying, "The



population of Brazil is... The chief main product is... The gross national product is..." We do not do that; we speak in narrative. After we state a main point, we can expound on it. We might say, "Now that we know we need to present Christ, we can see that we need to present Him to all kinds of difficult people. We will face them in various situations. We need to see the kind of people Paul faced. For instance, look at..." I just said about three sentences before I got to the first subpoint. As a result, do not rush into subpoints after statement of the main point. Tell what you mean by the main point, and explain how you support it with subpoints. Why are they ordered so? What causes us to consider the matter this way? The audience cannot see your outline, so transitions keep tying components back to the central idea.

A typical mark of sermon excellence is consistent use of tiebacks. These are transitions at the end of each major component of thought that tie that thought back to the sermon's main idea, particularly the fallen condition focus (FCF). As you begin working on your sermons, one of the things I have cautioned you about is to look at your applications and see if they tie back to the FCF. It is very easy when you are in the flow of a message to begin to talk about how this must apply somewhere but what you are saying does not relate to what you said was the burden of the message. As you have gotten to the main thing to be done (application), does it relate to what you said was going to be the burden of the sermon? Is there a conceptual or transitional tieback that reminds the listener that you are still talking about what you said you would do?

There are different types of transitions. The first major type is dialogical transitions. Dialogical transitions ask out loud the questions listeners would ask if they could. "Do you want to know what that means? It means..." I just asked a question out loud. For example, you could use the who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. You may have heard a preacher say in a sermon, "I have talked to you about the fact that God knows tomorrow. How are we going to apply that to our lives?" Ask the question out loud. People almost never tire of that question, "How will we apply this?" You could do that practically every sermon, and people would be just fine. You can ask about explanation, "How do we know this is true? If this will not work, what will? What plan does God offer for this? What comes next?" Asking questions like this is the mindset to assume in creating all transitions. Whether you voice the question or not, you learn to hear the question in the mind of the listener and answer it. If you listen as the listener would listen to your message, you have some advantages. If you ask questions that are in their heads, it gets their attention. You will make their heads come up, "I was wondering about that." It also makes you more credible, because it shows that you as a preacher are in their heads. You think about what they are concerned about. It is a very strong identification point if you go along and say, "I know what you are thinking. If He knows tomorrow, why is tomorrow so scary to me?" "That is exactly what I was thinking!" If you actually ask their objections or doubts, it shows that you are not afraid of their objections and doubts. It is a strong credit to you—"You live where I live, and you are willing to ask what I am thinking." Asking questions out loud also makes the listener hungry for an answer.

In our circles, it is not so common that preachers ask questions, pause, and wait for the answer. I preach in a lot of Presbyterian circles, so sometimes I pause, and people will give me the answer. Then they will look embarrassed as though they were not supposed to do that. Actually, the more I have preached in those churches, the more people begin responding. And I want them to respond. I want that feedback and dialogue. It means that now we are engaged together. You are thinking what I am thinking; I am thinking what you are thinking. We are exploring the Scriptures together. Part of the reason I do that is because I love to feel like I connect with people. If I can get people thinking, and if I know I am thinking what they are thinking, it really enhances credibility. It involves the listener; it shows I am interested in them. All those things come by asking questions out loud.

Let me give some hints for using dialogical transitions. The best explanation answers, “How do we know this means what I just said?” For example, “I just said, ‘God knows tomorrow.’ How do I know that is what this text means? Look at the text. It says...” Then I will begin to analyze and answer my own question. The best application answers the question “How do we apply this truth?” I think you can ask that question every Sunday. The best illustration answers “How can we see this better in our own experience?” We typically do not say that, though. We do not actually ask, “How can I illustrate this?” It removes the listener; you do something to him rather than involve him. “How can we apply” is a question that engages the listener, but “How do I illustrate” disengages the listener. An important place to learn an analytical question is immediately after the proposition. A good question after the proposition sets up the reasoning for the main points. That is called interrogating the proposition. You can do this after a main point statement, too. That is an analytical question response that sets up your subpoints.

Another form of transition is logical connection. This is a result of the dialogical process once you have thought about what your statement leads to. But you do not ask the question out loud. The basic form of a logical connection is not only but also. “Not only is this true, but also this is true.” In saying, “not only,” I reviewed, and in saying, “but also,” I previewed. Review and preview can take a lot of different forms. The basic Latin formulation is “not only, but also,” and a lot of Western thought proceeds along this way. For example, “If this is true, then these are the implications.” I did not say “not only, but also,” but it is the same impact. If this is true (review), then these are the implications (preview). “Our understanding is not complete until we also consider...” That is another form of “not only, but also.” It can get much longer, too. “God is loving, but that is not enough to warrant our trust. Good intentions do not make everything work out all right. That is why Paul continues his argument by saying that God is sovereign. God does not just desire what is good; He accomplishes it. Because God is sovereign, we must trust Him.” The main point comes at the end of that statement, but there are about four sentences that say, “not only, but also.”

Another form of transition is encyclopedic or numeric format. This is the most inartistic and elementary, but it is not wrong. If I say, “And second...” I imply that there has been a first point. Now we are ready for the next point. It is not very artistic, but it is very clear. To say that it is not artistic is not to say that it is bad or wrong. Many times in the sermon we will say, “First... second... third.” The place where we typically get in trouble is if we say “first” too often. “First I want you to know...” then after I say “first” about the main point, I might say “first” about the first subpoint. Then I say it again about the first subpoint in the next main point. I have all these firsts going on in the sermon. I need to use those numbers sparingly. At the same time, it certainly will work. There are various forms of numerating things. “The next thing we see...” The word “next” is a form of doing a numeric change in transition. “My second point is...” Let me caution you here that we do not say in sermons “A...B...C” to indicate subpoints. “First I want you to understand that God knows tomorrow. A—Even if we do not, B—even if our friends...” We do not say A, B, C in normal conversation. Even the words “Finally” or “in conclusion” indicate numeric change. We have already learned that they can cause watch breaks. We recognize that they also cause hope occasionally! If you need them, it is a way of saying, “Now we have gotten to the end.” It is a form of numeric break.

There are a few more types of transition, one of which is the parallel statement. Look for the review and the preview in this example. “It may sound insensitive to emphasize that God is the object of our faith until you remember the Scripture also teaches we are the object of God’s affection.” This uses parallel words to review and preview. There are also transitions that are pictorial or illustrative. Even the phrase, “The flip side of the coin is...” is a form of illustrative transition. We look at one side of the coin; now we will look at the other side. I told you earlier in the course about the guy whose sermon was the crash investigation approach. Think about what he said, “Already we determined the point of impact. Next we

need to determine if it was pilot error or mechanical error. Is it something he did or something someone else did?” That goes through the illustration as a form of transition. The illustrative progress also shows the transition of thought.

Sometimes illustrations themselves can be great transitions, making us see relationships between points. These transitions say, “In the same way...” We have not talked about this yet. This actually takes the illustration and drops it down between points. This works especially well in a two-point message where there is tension or balance. It shows in an illustrative form how you need the flip side and the tension. Sometimes the illustration shows the relationship between main points. It is not just what one main point is about, but sometimes the illustration shows the relationship between main points. I did that in a sermon I gave here earlier in the semester. I talked about a student named Mark Talbot who, in 1992, was killed here. I mentioned his wife, Mary, who did part of the devotional memorial service here. She talked about Mark and his son going to see Jesus. It was the end of her world but the beginning of heaven. That was what I talked about in that sermon—you have to come to the end of this world before heaven opens to you. I used an illustrative transition to talk about both main points together. It was the hinge between those two main points. Sometimes illustrations can work that way as well.

We have talked about tiebacks a couple of times. Tieback illustrations relate a matter just covered to the central idea first introduced. For example, “We have talked about Christ being our high priest because it relates directly to our understanding of why we are not rejected simply because we sin.” The FCF of this message is that we fear that we are rejected because we sin. Probably at the end of a main point, the preacher ties back to the FCF. “This is why we talked about this...” because it relates to the burden of the message. It is particularly important to keep relating each main point to the FCF since this keeps us developing a message rather than simply describing a text. That sounds strange, but our job is not merely to describe the text but to develop the message as it relates to the burden of the Holy Spirit for the text. I do not just say something else to note. I point out how what I note relates to the purpose of the sermon, which hopefully is the purpose of the passage as well.

Another major category of transitions is billboards. We just talked about tiebacks, which review what is said and connect it to the major theme. A very common pattern that is powerful is the use of billboards. Billboards are crystallized statements of key terms following main point (or subpoint) statements in the order they will appear. We state key terms in the order they will appear in what we are about to talk about. Billboards typically occur right after the proposition in which they use the key terms of the magnet clauses of the main points to say what is coming. Another key place for billboards is right after the main point that uses key terms of the subpoints. Let me give you an example. The proposition is “Because God will judge sin, we must proclaim His Word in every situation. Paul tells Timothy plainly, ‘I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead and is appearing in His kingdom, everything we do is before God and the Lord Jesus Christ.’ In light of this divine oversight, let us encourage each other to proclaim the Word of God, to rescue the needy, to defend the truth, and to fulfill our duty.” You can see key terms: rescue the needy, defend the truth, and fulfill our duty. These will reappear in the main points. The first main point is “Because God will judge sin, we must proclaim His Word to rescue the needy.” We know “defend the truth and fulfill our duty” are coming. They will be in the magnet clauses of the main points that are to come. A billboard is just what it says. I drive down the sermon highway, and I have a billboard that says what is ahead. I use the key terms in the billboard. It is knit together with the terms that will become familiar to the ear. I say what is ahead and use key terms of what is ahead in the main points to organize the thought of the message.

There are some times that you want to use billboards, but at other points they will not serve you.

Sometimes you will want to notify others of what is ahead, but other times you will not want to give that information away. If the listener knows what is ahead, he or she may not go down that highway. There can be issues that you know that if you say it too early people will not listen to what you need to tell them. So you may build the case before you state its conclusion. There can be strategies to veil impact. This is a strategy and not ignorance to what is coming! There can be a reason to veil intention to give greater impact. We talked in a previous lesson about how the Bible sometimes veils where it is going as the strategy is built. But most of the time, it helps people to know where we are going. That way they have some orientation in what we are doing. We use billboards to help the preacher clarify his own thought. Billboards also help listeners see the plan of the message.

Let me give some hints for using billboards. We tell the congregation what we will say, then we say it, and then we remind them that we said what we said we would say. We signal, tell, and remind. A billboard signals what you will say. The explanation says it. The tieback reminds them what you said and ties it to the whole. Something to observe is that if I use a billboard after the proposition, it will use the key terms of the magnet clauses of the main points. It will sound very similar to the summary and the conclusion. The concise summary in the conclusion has the key terms of the magnet clauses of the main points. The billboard may sound a great deal like the concise summary in the conclusion. In doing that, it knits the sermon together so that it can be well followed. The reasoning now comes together. I said what I was going to talk about, I talked about it, and now I conclude with a reminder of those terms. You can see that I discussed what I said we would discuss. It has a sense of cohesion and professional planning. This was not just a thrown together thing. You knew where you were going, and you brought me there. You planned it well, you exegeted the Scriptures, and you showed me what they meant. You knew what you wanted to accomplish, and you did it. Using those key terms at both phases, early and late, accomplishes that.

Let me give some final hints on transitions. Verse references are usually stated immediately after the principle statement of the main point or subpoint that needs to be proven—state, place, prove. State a main point, place where it is in the text, and identify the verse. As a caution, try not to say, “Look with me at verses 8-13. What they mean is...” No one can look at those verses in the few seconds that you gave them. Try not to do that unless you will stop and read all of those verses. Usually when we state and place, we say, “Look with me at verse 13. Right in the middle of the verse it says...” and then I read it. Read the portion of the verse that applies to what you are saying. Do not just read the number.

There are some exceptions to this. Expository main point or subpoint statements usually have a text reference immediately following them. But when expounding a narrative or developing an idea based on context or genre, you may simply have to identify the event, textual feature, or aspect of the context that proves your point. I might say, “And Goliath fell down. Look with me in verse 14. It says, ‘Goliath fell down...’” They already knew Goliath fell down. It may be enough to refer to the narrative portion that everyone already knows. If I need the precise wording of the narrative, “David said, ‘You come with sword, javelin, and spear. I come in the name of the Lord.’” I might want to say, “Look at verse 13,” where he says that.” But it may be that there are events that everyone knows that we do not need to refer to by verse in long narratives. The second hint is that context may not have a verse. I may say, “Paul is in prison when he writes this, and still he speaks with great hope.” I cannot say, “Look with me at verse 3. It says he is in prison.” That is the context of the writing of the letter. That may be part of a subpoint where I have to refer to context rather than cite a verse. Most of the time I will actually cite the verse and read the portion that applies to it. That is the transition between the statement and the explanation itself. When you read the verse or the portion of the verse, it supports what your explanation will say.

Let me make another reminder about retention hierarchy. The part that will be most remembered out of a

sermon is the illustrations. Then applications are remembered. They will not remember transitions at all! But we bother with them because the retention hierarchy is flawed. The thing that is more remembered than any sermon component is the *ethos* of the speaker. *Ethos* is credibility and compassion. Transitions serve toward that end. I can logically see how this is connected, and you care enough about me to glue it together. When it is not glued together, people do not just think you do not think well. They think you do not care well. When we use transitions to knit this thing together, we ultimately build not only understanding of our sermon but we also tell people that they can understand what we say, and we care enough about them to word it in a way that can be understood. These are not difficult concepts. They are plain and matter of fact. But it will help us to think of how people listen to what we say.

Let me review quickly. Some basic functions of transitions are to review and preview. A dialogical transition is a question asked out loud in the body of the sermon. The key wording beaconing behind a logical connection transition is “not only, but also.” A billboard is the use of key words to preview. These could be the key words of following subpoints or main points.

## **Methods of Sermon Presentation**

Let me quickly review from the last lesson. Some basic functions of transitions are to review and preview. A dialogical transition is a question asked out loud in the body of the sermon. The key wording beaoning behind a logical connection transition is “not only, but also.” A billboard is the use of key words to preview. These could be the key words of following subpoints or main points.

In this lesson we want to look at the options a preacher has in preparing the materials necessary to preach a sermon. We talked about introductions, conclusions, and propositions. There are many things that we have talked about, but what do you actually take into the pulpit, and how do you present it? We will get into delivery aspects in a little bit, but first let us talk about what preachers take with them into the pulpit and how they typically organize it.

As you think of types of presentation, Broadus says there are three basic ways that preachers present messages. That will affect how we prepare what we take with us into the pulpit. The three major presentations can be reading, reciting, or extemporizing. Those are the basic options. I can simply read a message, memorize it and recite it, or do some form of extemporizing. I have something in my brain, but I still spontaneously speak as I go. In this generation, extemporizing is most accepted. Reading to people will not work in this generation. If you can naturally recite, that will work. But if it sounds like you are reading off of a teleprompter even while you recite, people will not listen. It will sound so canned. This is not the generation that will listen to that kind of thing. Typically there is some form of extemporizing that we will use.

Lewis Paul Layman gives a more exhaustive list of how what we present and what we prepare affects things. He talks about it in terms of different types of prepared messages. First are manuscript sermons, which might be read. The most famous preacher in history for reading sermons is Jonathan Edwards. Do not forget he stopped reading after a while. Even in his generation, it did not keep working. He read, but then he stopped doing it because he recognized it with his own people. Manuscript sermons can be read or memorized. There are people who have a photographic memory. Dr. Benton at Kirk of the Hills has that ability. If you listen to the message in the first service and the second service, it is basically word for word the same, and he does not read it. There are people with exceptional abilities, but most of us are not able to memorize. That means a third use of manuscript sermons is that they might be converted to outlines and extemporized in the pulpit. The manuscript is used to get you very ready, and then you convert it to an outline and extemporize in the pulpit off of the outline. That is what we will do for two semesters. We will prepare manuscripts, convert them to outlines, and preach from the outline. The manuscript ensures preparation, and hopefully the outline ensures eye contact and spontaneity.

Another type of prepared message is the outline sermon. There are two forms of outline sermons, the first of which is extended outlines. This is what most preachers I know use. They preach from extended outlines of two to four pages of outline material that they take into the pulpit. The second is a bare-bones outline. That is where a lot has been practiced so the preacher does not even want the outline itself to rob him of eye contact. He creates something just to prompt his memory and uses that. My goal in using a bare-bones outline is that if I forget, it is my safety blanket. I just want something to prompt my thinking, but I do not want to look at this a lot. I have something that gets me going.

A bare-bones outline is what I typically take into the pulpit. I do not often look at it, but I have that security if I need it. It is something that has consistent visual markers. I usually use Roman numerals for major main points. I use Arabic numerals for subpoints. I almost always circle an illustration. I almost

always use this little conclusion for application. I do not know why I do that. I did it years ago, and I still do it. It has become something that is a consistent visual marker for me, so when my eye looks on the page, I automatically know what I am looking at. The illustration may not always come at the same point. I may move it before or after the subpoints. But I use a circle, because it is a habit that has developed over the years. I use circles to indicate it is an illustration to distinguish it from my eye picking up main points.

If you have extended outlines or bare-bones outlines, that does not mean that they have never existed in manuscript form. This is what you take into the pulpit, but you may very well have had a manuscript outline that you converted to an extended outline or a bare-bones outline. A truly extemporized sermon is one that was never in manuscript form. I think most preachers prepare extended outlines and practice the extended outline so that the pulpit is not the first place that you ever verbalize what the extended outline says. Most preachers I know prepare an extended outline and at least practice portions of it before standing in the pulpit. Many preachers I know do the extended outline, practice it, and then convert to the bare-bones outline. That is what they take into the pulpit. You may never want to do what I do, but this is what I find I have to do. My own practice is to go from exegetical outline to extensive homiletical outline to full manuscript to bare-bones outline. I use the extended outline to prepare a manuscript, but I do not want to take a manuscript into the pulpit (with rare exceptions), and then I preach from a bare-bones outline. I will tell you more about why I do some of those things in just a bit.

Let us talk about the other alternative of sermon preparation. Beyond the outline sermons, there are what Lewis Paul Layman calls unwritten sermons. We might call these extemporized sermons. The first type of extemporized sermon is the mental outline. You may never put pencil to paper, but you still put an outline in your brain. You work it out. These are the great sermons I think about when I jog! Then I forget by the time I get back home. These mental outline sermons are ones that you have thought through. The other kind of extemporaneous sermon is called “true impromptu.” It is spur of the moment, and you just go on with it. It might follow the flow of the text, but it has the spontaneity of the moment.

Let me give a few modern variations from these. One is called putting the outline in the manuscript. The sermon we have been going over throughout this class has a lot of Roman numerals and bold face words. It makes the outline jump out of the manuscript. The outline is keyed into the message, and there are a lot of ways that people do that. You can do it with bold facing, different fonts, using margin differences, or even using a highlight to note key points. That is a form of writing the manuscript but making the outline visible within the manuscript. Another thing that is a product of the media age in which we live now is a number of preachers who use broadcast manuscripts. They put the manuscript on only two-thirds of the page, typically on the right-hand side. The left hand third of the page is for the outline. There may be key terms there. Instead of reading the illustration, I might just write “puppy dog” and write key terms in the left-hand margin.

Those of you who have done broadcast work know that that is a little bit reversed. Typically in a broadcast situation, you would put text on the left-hand side, and the camera and audio cues are on the right. That is because you read a manuscript and the cues are on the right for the director, but we flip it. The first thing I want my eye to see is my notes to myself, my outline. On the left-hand margin I put the outline features, and the right hand is the manuscript. People at Asbury Seminary have done a lot of experimenting with those broadcast styles. I did that for a few years and found it quite effective when I was in pastoral ministry particularly. I used the left-hand margin for the outline and did not become too dependent on the manuscript but had it if I wanted it. It is an alternative for you.

Let us go over strengths and weaknesses of different preparation methods. A strength of preaching with

the impromptu method is that it is not mechanical. It does not sound at all artificial. It can also be a great time saver. Sometimes you need a time saver. Sometimes it is time to preach, and you were not given a warning. Something needs to be said. These are times of crisis and tragedy where you simply need to speak. Those may cause impromptu messages. A weakness of this kind of message is that it is disorganized and not put together well. It might take a long time to terminate the message, or it might terminate too fast. It may not have a very clear direction, and it could have a lot of mistakes in it. Obviously it does not have much study behind it. The strength is that it is very natural and saves time you need in that moment. But its weaknesses are its unpreparedness, which is inherently unbiblical. "Study to show yourself a workman approved unto God who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Preparation is needed to do what the Bible requires. So just being unprepared by habit rather than necessity is the problem. Everyone understands being unprepared by necessity. I struggle with this, though it sounds so easy here in class. My own background and tradition was primitive Baptist training. The sense was that it was not only artificial but also inhibiting of the work of the Holy Spirit to prepare. I was really helped by a man who was a defrocked Methodist pastor. He and his wife were in my church years after the troubles in their lives. I mentioned to him at one point that my background and training was in my father's church. Those men would show up and two or three of them would sit at the front and say, "Who wants to speak this morning?" A little conversation would go back and forth until someone decided to speak. He would stand and speak, and it was viewed as improper to have prepared. The Methodist minister listened to me say that and asked me, "What keeps the Holy Spirit from working in your study?" I thought that was a great question. Nothing keeps the Holy Spirit from working in your study. The Holy Spirit works all places and at all times. He uses instruments that are well honed, but it seems that there is not anything unbiblical about preparing ahead of time. Some say it imposes man's ideas on the preaching, and that is true if you have not prayed in your study. But if you prayed with your study of the text, there is nothing that should have prohibited the Holy Spirit from doing His work there as well.

There are also strengths and weaknesses of preaching extemporaneously from outlines. The advantages are that if you have an outline, you have had some preparation. By an outline only it is a shortcut in a busy schedule. An outline is quicker to prepare than a full manuscript. Outlines also help you keep eye contact and natural expression. Ordinarily it allows more freedom and power of delivery. The disadvantage of preaching extemporaneously from outlines is the temptation to be unprepared. There is a temptation to do too little work. There is also the possibility of imprecision and mistakes.

I have mentioned before how much I respect John Broadus, the father of expository preaching. One of the reasons I do is because of how wise he is. In his era, which was 150 years ago, you think about the insistence on well-prepared and scholarly sermons of those days. He talked about the advantages and disadvantages of extemporaneously preaching from outlines, "The style of an extemporaneous sermon is apt to be less condensed, less finished than if it were written out or recited. But this is not necessarily a fault. The style may be better adapted to speaking as opposed to writing." Extemporaneous preaching may sound more like you sound when you talk and therefore not artificial. He said this,

A similar and more serious disadvantage of extemporaneous sermons is the danger of making blunders in statement. In the ardor of the moment, the speaker is likely to say some things that are irrelevant, ill considered, improper, and sometimes, alas, even untrue. Some men more than others run this risk, but all are more or less liable. Some hints may be given as safeguards: make thorough preparation and thus diminish the danger, keep a cool head no matter how warm the heart. If the slip is serious, correct it on the spot and go on. If very serious but not observed at the



time, correct it on a later occasion. But for the most part, leave the mistakes along. If you have real merits and enjoy the confidence of your congregation, it will be one of your most blessed privileges to live down many blunders.

We have probably all teased our pastor at some point for what he said. When he blushed, smiled, and said, “Thank you,” you actually loved him more because he could take it well. Obviously if it is a real mistake, correct it. One of my favorite examples of this was Dan Doriani, who is one of the best preachers and teachers I know. When he was a new professor, he preached his inaugural sermon here in the chapel. He preached away and said, “And Jesus Christ is so great. He is the greatest of the created beings.” Then he said, “No He is not; that is a heresy! And I’ll be the first to deny it!” He made a terrible blunder, but it did not bother him. The mark of great speakers is not that they fail to make mistakes. It is that they are poised when they make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes. If you can take it, live it down, and move on, that is great. Actually, people will be very comfortable with you. The advantages of preaching from written manuscripts are great precision and assured preparation. The disadvantages are lack of eye contact and the temptation to read.

We will use the method of Robert Murray McShane. Just recently we had a man from his church here. David Robertson was here from Saint Peters Free Church. That was the famous church of Robert Murray McShane, the revivalist who died young. McShane prepared a manuscript, converted it to an outline, and preached from the outline. He felt that it greatly aided the ardor and passion of his speaking but still came from great preparation. After writing out a manuscript, you could put your outline in a key word form in the margin. You could also put your outline in the manuscript, using highlights, underlining, or margin variation. Or you could put the outline on another piece of paper. That is what I do, using consistent eye catchers. Over time, develop a consistent eye catcher.

Keep main points from starting at the bottom of pages. You have a lot of paper with you. If you do not start a main point two-thirds down on the page, you will keep from confusing your eye. Experienced preachers typically start all main points at the top of the next page. Even if they have a lot of white space at the bottom, they go onto the next page. They do not try to look down while they flip pages. They move pages while they talk. They look at the congregation, so they want their eyes to be able to look down and know exactly where the next point is. If they start the main point at the top of pages, they will automatically be oriented to the next main point every time they do a transition. Start main points at the top of pages, and find some visual point like circling to indicate where you are.

If you move pages, slide them. If you pick up the pages, everyone will look at them. If you try to organize them in a nice stack, it will also be distracting. Watch those who are very concerned about sticking with people and do not want them looking at their notes. They learn to just move them across. They have a discard stack and a use stack. I use one stack, and when I am done with it I look at you, but I move the page to the discard stack. I may pick up my Bible, slide this under, and move it over. I do not want to put something in people’s eye line and vision. It creates distraction for people.

As we follow these various methods, we want to make sure that we have enough in front of ourselves that we can preach well. At the same time, we want to have a lot of eye contact with people.

Let us talk about how to preach from memory so that you keep a lot of eye contact. My best hint here is to use key words. If your main points are around “father, faith, and tomorrow,” even though the main point statement is much longer, having key words in order really helps you. Use key words that are parallel. Use illustrations to key your thought. The illustration is automatically the summary of the explanation and the preparation for the application. Those of you who are visually oriented, if you

remember the series of illustrations, the whole sermon will appear in front of you. It reminds you of what the explanation was about and prepares you for the application.

Finally, I would encourage you to learn the principles of imprinting. You may never want to do this, but it is something I do. If I prepare a 30-minute message, I will try to go through it entirely out loud at least twice the day before. I believe it is not just in my brain: I want to hear how the words sound. The last thing I do before I go to sleep is read it even while I am in bed. I want the last thing that goes in my brain to be that message. I believe in imprinting. The first thing I do when I wake up in the morning is I read through it again. I want to imprint that on my brain so that when I finally speak, I do not wonder where I am going. My greatest concern now is to get the message into you, not to get it out of me. I want to get it into you, because it is planted in my brain. But that is a lot of work. If I say a 30-minute message twice out loud, once before I go to bed, and once when I get up, that is two hours of practice right there.

That may sound awful, but I remember Ozzie Smith, multi-time golden glover and perhaps the best shortstop in baseball, who showed up at the ball park for a 7:30 game at 3:30. He took grounders for at least an hour and a half. He was the best shortstop of all time, and he practiced. Do not let anyone embarrass you about practicing. You want to get yourself ready so that you are finally free. You can over prepare, but you want to get so prepared that you are very free to say what God has given you to do.

## **Voice and Gesture**

As we begin lesson 18, I will review some concepts with you. What are some of the advantages of preaching from manuscripts? There are a couple of advantages to preaching from a manuscript, including precision and preparation. What are the advantages of preaching from outlines? The advantages of preaching from outlines include spontaneity and naturalness. There is some preparation with outlines, but probably not as much. Yet we recognize the advantage of naturalness, and we would have to add eye contact as an advantage. The difference between an extended outline and a bare-bones outline is explained in the words themselves. What is a pulpit outline? It is the last variation that you take into the pulpit with you. It is probably not the exegetical outline. It is probably not even the homiletical outline that formed the basis of your manuscript. It is that final form of an outline that you take into the pulpit with you, perhaps marked up, or however it will help you. It is a key in your brain that what you wrote down on paper may not be the best thing to take into the pulpit. You may need to rework it again for the visual effect of what you are taking into the pulpit. That is a natural thing that preachers do. It is not wrong to go through a few permutations before you finalize your pulpit outline.

Let me pray with you.

*Heavenly Father, we praise You that You have seen to sanctify the face of Jesus in us and You do that by sanctifying us with Him. We pray, even this day, Father, that You would not only be sanctifying us but glorifying Christ in us by having His Word made more excellent for Your people. Treat us, we pray, Father, as those who are seeking to honor You, as those who are seeking to speak Your truth, as those who are seeking for souls who are marching toward hell to find heaven by the truths of Your Word. We ask for Your blessing and care as we talk about things that are practical and in some ways fun, but we recognize that much hangs in the balance of doing Your work well. Grant Your Spirit to impress upon our minds that which we should hold for the years to come. We ask Your care in this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

What we are talking about today is what makes sermon delivery effective in terms of voice and gesture. As I was just praying, I did mean that some of this is just plain fun to talk about. You can take it that way. I am not going to ask you to get every nuance of what is said today. I would rather have you get impressions of what helps us communicate well to people and makes our communication interesting and effective for them.

Nothing I am going to say is more important than this key: energy and enthusiasm with sincerity equals power. There is absolutely nothing more important than being enthusiastic about what you are saying. Have the attitude, "I really believe this is important, and I want to communicate it to you." There is no rule of delivery or rule of presentation that is more important than communicating, "I am really interested in this, and I am really interested in you." When you can communicate that kind of enthusiasm about what you are doing, everything else falls low on the order of importance.

Our manner should conform to our content. You will hear me say this repeatedly. Does manner reflect content? If you are saying something is important, are you showing it by the way you present it? If you are saying, "I really care about you," does your manner reflect that content? The idea is that when our manner conforms to our content naturally, it becomes obvious that our message has had an impact on us. That is what makes it infectious. It is not that I am just trying to impact you. It is also obvious that it has impacted me already. My manner is reflecting that something has impacted me. That is the infectious nature of delivery.

How we speak with naturalness will become much affected by whether or not it has affected me. Naturalness is the key. For this generation, we are way beyond the elocutionist movement of the early twentieth century. There was a right way of saying everything. If you have ever seen an elocutionist's diagrams, they tell you where your feet should be for saying certain words. They tell you what your hand should show for certain words, whether you should have an open or closed hand. They had elaborate detail about exactly how things were being communicated in the post-Victorian era. We are way beyond that and would not accept that.

We are very affected by broadcast styles of delivery. We expect something that is natural in expression. It should not be flat, but it should naturally have manner reflect content appropriate for the personality that is speaking. We also recognize that there are vastly different personalities. In whatever way you say, with your personality, "This is very important," that is how you should communicate. The difficulty you must recognize is that we are not used to being in public situations and feeling comfortable. So we stop being natural. My goal is not to train you in new delivery techniques. My goal is to say, "Be natural." We want to find out what does that so that we can throw away those things that make us artificial.

If you think about the power of delivery in some of its basic nature, I do not know a better way of saying it than how Benjamin Franklin once responded to George Whitefield. Some of you may know this story. Benjamin Franklin, who was not a believer, encouraged other people to go hear George Whitefield, the great evangelist of the American Revolutionary War times. Somebody once said to Franklin, "Why do you go and listen to Whitefield and tell others to go? You do not believe him." Franklin said, "No, I do not believe him, but he believes what he says." Do you hear that? He believes it? For that reason, Franklin had to listen to him, and he thought others should as well.

What makes something natural? Let me remind you of an example I have given before. What is an example of natural public address? When I was in my high school years, being raised in the South, I went through one of those rites of passage that young men go through that is known as "catfish grabbin'." A few of you may have gone through that technique. Catfish grabbin' is when you do not use a pole, line, hook, or sinker. You go along the reservoirs, where the big dams are in the South, and all the rock that is put there becomes ideal territory for catfish. What you do is you get about chest-high in the water, and you start reaching up into the holes. You start reaching and feeling around in the hole, and when a catfish is in a hole it slimes the hole. So you feel the hole and then you go in and grab him by the gills and then you pull him out. You are not looking for a two- or three-pound fish, of course, but you are looking for a 15 pound fish or a 20 or 40 pound fish. Imagine you have pulled out a 60 pound fish. You throw it in the back of your pickup truck and you do not need gas, but you still pull into the gas station. What you want to do is say, while you are pumping gas, "Hey, look back there in the back of the truck." One of the attendants will say to you, "Wow, how did you get that?" You say, "I was out grabbin'. It was so great. I could tell, just as soon as I got my hand in that hole, that I had something. It was a big hole, and there was slime all around it. As I reached in, I felt his whiskers first, and every whisker was as big as a pencil. I knew this thing was going to be huge. I reached in there, and first he put his mouth around my hand. He began to twist my wedding ring, and I thought I was going to lose my finger. I shoved my hand into his throat, and I began to pull." You then begin to recognize that you have an audience growing. It is not just one person, but other people begin to see what you have. Then you begin to say, "Not only did he grab my hand..." and you begin to raise your voice. "When he began to pull, I did not think I was going to come to the surface again. He was so heavy I was not sure whether he was going to let me go if I did not let him go. So I just kept pulling. I thought I was going to drown! When he finally came out, I said, 'Man, I got the biggest fish I have ever even seen, much less caught!'"

What did you just do? You were certainly enthusiastic about your catch. As you begin to speak to more people, though, you naturally enlarge your conversation. You pick up volume. You expand your gestures. You always fill the room. You fill the context so that you are speaking more loudly for more people. You also gesture more broadly for more people. It is not even something you think about. It just naturally happens.

If you are speaking in a Sunday school class and it is a small room and you have toddlers, what do you naturally do? You narrow your gestures and you drop your voice. If you are in a large auditorium, however, and there are 300 people, what do you automatically do? The most natural thing to do is raise your voice and expand your gestures. If you are in an auditorium with 10,000 people, and some of you in your life may be in that situation, you recognize that you do not merely expand your gestures, but the whole stage becomes part of your gesture. You begin to expand your gestures by moving your body back and forth. You try to fill the context or narrow it naturally.

You would do that as an enlarged conversation. When we are preaching in the natural era that we are in, the most appropriate way to think about things is that we are in an enlarged conversation. It is not drama. That will put people off in this day and age. It is not oratory. It is an enlarged conversation, which keeps it natural.

There are implications of natural public address. First, you already know how to do it. I really cannot teach it to you. You already know how to do it. The idea ought to be to go with what is natural and throw away what is artificial and imposed on you by the nervousness of others looking on. I have teased you before about when you were in high school and they called you up on the stage to get your varsity letter. You had to pull yourself away from the table where you were eating your chicken dinner. You had to actually walk up on the stage. You had to run down the track or field with expertise, but actually walking up on the stage seemed so difficult because everyone was looking at you. You would not even think about it normally. The idea is to stay natural even though people are looking at you. You already know how to do it.

Do things you naturally do. If you were at the lunchroom and I would videotape you, what would you naturally do? You would look people in the eye. If there were five people to whom you were talking, you would raise your voice to talk to all five, not just to one. You would scan them. You would not just look at one person. You would look at different ones. If you gestured, which you would do, you would raise your hands above your sternum and below your eyes. What you would be doing is raising your gestures to a normal conversational line of sight. You would not gesture down low or in front of your face. You would be above the sternum and away from your body. Nobody would teach you to do that. You would naturally do it.

Before we go into all the particulars, I will only say that if you forget everything else I will teach you, here are the basic aspects of delivery and posture. These are some things to think about. What are you going to do? Stand up straight. Look people in the eye. Speak to those at greatest distance from you. When you do those things, the rest takes care of itself.

As we think of those basic features of delivery, what are the basic features? We usually think of two: voice and gesture. Voice and gesture are the basic features of delivery. We usually break gesture down into a few smaller attributes. First is eye contact. Second is hand motion. Third is body motion and posture. Fourth may sound strange, but you can understand it readily, which is facial animation. We break these things down, not in order to get back to the elocutionist movement, trying to think about how to do all of those things correctly, but rather to keep from becoming artificial.

Ralph Lewis, in an important book called *Speech for Persuasive Preaching*, began to identify those things that put off the modern audience. He identified what makes people say, “I do not want to hear anything you have to say.” Listen to some of these, and you will immediately recognize how they put you off as well. What creates distrust of speakers? Lewis suggested traits such as obvious skills, artifice, cleverness, loud haranguing, and persistent aggressiveness—which is very common among young people, particularly angry young men, which we can often be in the pulpit. He also identified ornateness, which is when everything is hearts, trumpets, and flowers. Other problems are too evident use of technical skills, high-flown language, or glib tongues. That last trait refers to the preachers with whom everything is funny. We love to laugh with them, but we do not trust them. It is an interesting dynamic. What does it reflect in you? Humor can be a great gift, and it can be used powerfully. If everything seems to be putting you on stage, however, we will enjoy it, but we will not trust you.

What are key terms in all of these things of voice and gesture? If we are not to create distrust, then our basic terms for voice and gesture are that we want to be appropriate, varied, and purposeful. I want to emphasize the key thought there of purposeful. Although I will tell you what the things are that create barriers that you do not intend, nonetheless there is nothing you can do wrong if it has an appropriate purpose. Well, maybe not nothing, but almost nothing. The reason I say that is because there are exceptions. I have mentioned that you should not grab the horns of the pulpit. The reason I say that is because it usually locks us down and our hands are no longer free. It is a nervous reaction of grabbing something to hang on to. At the same time, if you are too worried about grabbing the horns of the pulpit, you may create a buzzer effect, either in you or in other people. Instead, you should recognize that there might be times when you want to say something that gets the attention of the audience and so you may grab the horns. In that case you do it for a purpose. You are saying, “I really mean this.” There can be a purpose for virtually everything. I will tell you not to sway and not to use chopping motions. If you do not have a purpose for it, then it creates distraction. Yet there can be a purpose for virtually every one of those things. So if something has a purpose, we really cannot do much that is wrong.

Let us think about some of the relative importance of these things. Why do we even talk about delivery? A famous study done by Albert Mehrabian at Yale in the 1940s found that 55% of the message is communicated by facial and physical cues. What are people actually picking up from you? Fifty-five percent of communication is actually facial and physical cues. Thirty-eight percent is through vocal cues. That relates to how something is said. You can tell people you love them, and it can sound either caring or sarcastic. You can use the same words but communicate different messages. Only 7% is communicated by the verbal content, or what is said. In other words, Mehrabian contends that 93% of a message is in the delivery.

Do you believe it? I would not! There is much that is powerfully being said here. Yet Mehrabian’s study has not only been quoted many times, but it has also been questioned many times. I think that Haddon Robinson said it best in his book *Biblical Preaching*. Rather than saying it is always this way, Robinson said that research and experience agree that if nonverbal messages contradict the verbal, then the nonverbal will be believed. I do agree with that. If the nonverbal manner does not reflect content, then I will believe your manner. Yet what if they conform? What if manner and content conform? What will I believe? I will believe the content as well. I will not just hear 7%. I will hear much more of what you say when manner reflects content. Robinson said, “A pastor’s words may insist, ‘This is important,’ but if his voice sounds flat and expressionless and his body stands limp, the congregation will not believe him.” Why do we talk about delivery? It is not going to be as important as content, but if it contradicts the content, then we undercut what we are trying to say.

What are some basic features of delivery? In voice, you already know the basic rubric. We try to fill the room by speaking to those at greatest distance from you conversationally. That is a different thing from blasting. You are trying to speak to those at greatest distance from you conversationally. The old line of Spurgeon was “Fill the room, but speak to one.” I like that statement. It was said of Spurgeon, “He spoke to 1000 as though he was speaking to one person.” So you try to fill the room with volume but still speak conversationally.

Some aspects of volume are that we should avoid being too soft. That is obvious. You do not want to drop your voice so that people cannot hear you. Why? That would not be natural. It would not be natural to speak so that people could not hear you. You also want to avoid being too loud. Sometimes when people think about preaching, they are remembering a preacher from their youth who was very loud and bombastic. It may have been great for that generation. It may have been very appropriate for that generation. It typically does not work well in this generation. There are all kinds of cultural variables of which we need to be aware. Yet typically it does not work to blast away at people, particularly early in a message.

For young men in this culture, your greatest danger will be drop-offs. Those are drop-offs at the ends of sentences. We sometimes have that notion that although we are speaking to those at greatest distance, we try to emphasize what we are saying by dropping off and swallowing the last words of a sentence. It is something that we need to learn as preachers that in order to be natural in an enlarged conversation you must push out the ends of sentences. Push it out instead of dropping it off. As young people, we are enculturated in this culture to try not to offend in conversation. In order to emphasize something we really mean, we either raise our voice in frequency or we drop it in volume. Instead we must keep the volume up so that people can hear. I do it to this day, and people come up to me after services and say, “I could not hear the ends of sentences.” I know better, and I have to keep reminding myself so that people can hear.

Variety is another essential feature of voice. There are three basic types of monotone. One is low and slow. Another, which is more typical of young men in this culture, is high and fast. It is the machine gun that never stops. You think, “I have so much to say that I want to get my entire systematic theology course into this one message.” Then you are off to the races from the very beginning. There are not pauses, and what ultimately happens is there is no variation in delivery. The content can be great, but there is so much so fast that it is just a blur coming at people. There is no variation, and with no variation it is boring. Even if it is coming hard, aggressive, and fast, which is more typical of men in this culture, without variation it is just another form of monotone. Not for many of you, but for a few, is the third type of monotone, which is rhythmic. It is when I get in the habit of saying everything in a rhythm. You will encounter people who get into a rhythm and they cannot break it. It is another form of monotone. For most of us, high and fast is the thing to be aware of. We do not know how to take a breath or a pause because we are scared of the silence. We need to learn to say, “I really mean it.” Then pause and take a breath. Then continue saying, “And that is why I am talking to you.” A pause is very effective, and it adds variety. So the types of monotone are low and slow, high and fast, and rhythmic.

I do want to emphasize the importance of pausing when it comes to variety. There are two ways that we underline what we are saying in oral address. One is by changing the volume. The other is by silence. If you want to underline something, then stop talking. If you stop talking, people will look up. They will wonder why you have stopped. If you want to emphasize something, be courageous enough to come to a full stop, and people will know that you are either about to say something very important or you just did. If we do not pause, then the blur says none of it is very important. So variation is by volume and pause.

You will recognize that the great speakers, in even one sermon, will do everything from a whisper to a shout and everything in between. Yet it will be appropriate for the content. It will not just be drama. That will put us off. If they are saying things appropriate for the content, however, great variation is warranted and usually very powerful.

We want to speak with volume, variety, and third, with intensity. Intensity reflects the seriousness of what you are saying. It also reflects concern for the listener. When I am trying to be intense about something, particularly in preaching, I recognize that I am creating a tension. I want to show great seriousness for the subject. That is intensity. I also want to show compassion for the listener. That is a different kind of intensity. If I am only showing seriousness for the subject, then ultimately I will come across as harsh. Thus I have to, with concern for the subject, show care for the listener. That is something related to our attitude that is going to be reflected in the intensity of our words. Richard Baxter made the famous statement, "I want to speak as a dying man to dying men." He was that concerned about it. We recognize that his statement has lasted because it showed concern for the subject and for the listeners as well.

Physical preparation is also important. There are three quick rubrics for this point: fitness, food, and nerves. How do we get prepared to speak in a way that helps us? Two weeks ago I spoke eight times in one weekend, and I will tell you that I just got tired. I get tired. When that happens, I recognize that it takes more and more energy for me to speak with the energy that is required. Not sleeping much at night can be a problem. Our voice stops working. We lose the ability to speak with great variety, simply because our throat, our vocal mechanism, is itself tired. So being physically fit and rested are part of good delivery.

The issue of food is one of the fun and funny parts of this lesson. What does milk do to you if you drink milk or eat milk products just before you speak? It creates phlegm. You will end up clearing your throat repeatedly. What does caffeine do to you if you drink it just before you speak? It dries you out. It gives you cotton-mouth, as do many antihistamine products. The old idea about tea and honey is actually silly, because the tea will contradict what the honey is supposed to accomplish. Yet people try to get something warm and lubricating so that they can speak. If you have many caffeine and milk products before you speak, it may cause problems for most of you. It is something to be aware of if you have not thought about it. We have different personalities and physiques, but I find that either too much or too little food before you speak causes problems.

We know enough about the way the body works to know that if you have low protein and low sugar before you speak, you are going to have problems. Having some protein and some carbohydrates before you speak will be good. On the other hand, if you fill up, your system will slow down. I usually do not like to eat much before I speak. People often try to feed you before you speak, and I may take a bite or two, but I want to regulate my intake more. I do not want to be silly, so I do not want to create superstitions about what I eat, but I do want to heed basic science and biology. Some proteins, some carbohydrates, and some sugars will be good, and you want to have some liquid in you. Otherwise you will get cotton-mouth, and you will slow down because you do not have enough protein or water to keep you going. Too much or too little is bad. Salt products can dry you out. It may be silly, but you probably do not want to drink much soda before you speak. What will you do if you drink soda? You will burp. Our generation drinks a lot of soda, but we are not used to public speaking. If you drink much soda before you speak, you will be uncomfortable, or you will lose your discomfort in an embarrassing way. Our culture is very accustomed to speakers having a cup of water with them. Personally, I rarely use one, unless I am ill. It is nice if you have a cold or something to have a cup of water. I think most people excuse it if you pause for a moment to take a sip.



We have talked about fitness and food. What everyone is afraid of is their nerves. How do I deal with nervousness? This may sound strange, but you actually want to be nervous. You do not want to be incapacitated in your nervousness, but the best speakers turn their nerves into energy. They want that sense of the heart thumping. They want the sense of their palms being a little sweaty. What happens to people who are not accustomed to public speaking is they let their nerves throw them. They say, “Oh no, my palms are sweaty! My heart is pumping!” They begin to think something is wrong. If you think about it, however, if there are going to be 50 or 100 people listening to you, why would you not be nervous? It is the most natural thing in the world. It is natural to be nervous. If it also gets me a little energetic, why would I not want it?

I can tell you, even though this is not where most of you are in life, I do a lot of public speaking in many different places, and there are times when I am sitting on a stage in front of a couple hundred people and I will think to myself, “I am not nervous.” That is a problem. It means I have either taken it too far or I am too tired. If I am not a little nervous, then I believe I am not feeling the importance of it. I need to pray about it because I have become either too tired or too lackadaisical. I actually want some nerves. Professional speakers do a process of what they call “lifting.” They try to pull away from themselves and ask themselves objectively, “Where are you? Are you nervous? How nervous are you? Is it controllable, or is it not?” There are people who can be too nervous. Some of the best preachers I know still throw up every Sunday morning, because they are nervous. That may sound bad, but they are accustomed to knowing it is their personality. It is their system. It is how they are wired. They would be concerned if there was nothing going on in their system.

What if you think you are too nervous? You may actually believe you are incapacitated. You may be so nervous that you think you will mess up your words. You may not be able to think straight. Here are some quick ideas for you. First, simply walk around. Know the biology. There is adrenaline running through your system, so get rid of some of it. Get up and walk around. Walk around the church a time or two. For many of us, when we get nervous it means we should just go out and talk to people. Go interact a little and get some of the adrenaline out of your system by being in conversation with people. It is not about being afraid of the nerves. Recognize who you are and that nervousness is natural. Use it accordingly. Another idea is to talk to the Holy Spirit. Say, “Lord, settle me down.” Pray that God would give you the quietness of heart and the quickness of mind to do that task that He calls you to do. Prayer is also one of the ways to settle yourself. What I want is for you to not be scared that you are nervous. It is natural and actually quite helpful for the best speakers; as long as it does not throw you off that you are nervous. It is natural to be nervous.

Next we will consider some features of gesture. The basic rubric is that we want to gesture concepts, not words. If I begin to gesture words, I will create chopping motions. You will begin to gesture every word. That is not what we want to do. We want to gesture whole sentences. If you were haranguing people, you would gesture with each word. Instead you want to use gestures that fit the whole sentence. If you can think of it that way, it will not be a matter of doing it right or wrong. You will simply try to communicate a whole concept, and gestures will naturally take over.

How do we do it naturally? First, remember that the primary tool of gesture is the eyes. There are two reasons for that. First, if we do not look at people, then they will assume certain things. They will assume we do not know what we are going to say, and therefore we are unprepared. They will assume that we are too focused on what we are going to say, and therefore we do not care about them. We are disengaged from them. Finally, they will assume we are arrogant. If you do not look at people, they will assume you are arrogant.

It is important that we emphasize that you must look at people and not just toward them. You need to actually engage eyes. Many people just look at peoples' foreheads because they are nervous. They will look at foreheads or look just off to the side. They will not engage. If we do that, it communicates fear or arrogance. You must look at people in the eye. There is another reason you do that. What are you gauging when you speak? Why do you look at people when you talk? You are getting response. It is your thermostat for how things are happening. It is not only asking how the people are speaking to you, but it is also asking how the Holy Spirit is informing you as you speak. As much as we will put into preparing the message, you cannot fully prepare for the speaking event of preaching. It is a redemptive event in itself. One of the reasons we want to be looking at people is to engage what the Spirit is doing in them. You are asking the audience, "Are you being torn apart? Are you calloused? Are you hardened up? Are you comforted? Did I say something disquieting that I need to reflect on right now because I did not mean to be disquieting to you? What did I say that upset you that way?" You cannot plan the event on paper with everything that will happen in the preaching event itself. If you are thinking, "The Spirit is here. Christ is in my words. There are the people of God, receiving the bread of life, and what are they communicating to me about what is going on?" Even as I am speaking, I am turning up the volume, turning down the intensity, increasing the love, and repeating what I said in a better way. There are all kinds of dynamics by which I am responding to what the Spirit is now doing in this place.

What do you do if you see mixed reactions? Pay attention to those you trust. That is part of knowing the people. You know which people are good to use for a barometer and those who are not. Sometimes you can become aware that one who is normally a bad barometer is reacting, and that is something you need to pay attention to. What do you do if you see that there has been a reaction that is more intense or different than you intended? What do you do if you see that someone has been offended by what you said or hurt by what you said and you did not mean for it to happen that way? If you recognize in the moment how it occurred, then you can deal with it. I have done it many times at different levels. I have said something and seen people physically flinch when they heard it. I knew that they heard me in a way I did not mean. They read something into it. What I do is I go back and say, "What I mean is..." In that moment I will go back and acknowledge that the person was hurt in a way I did not intend. Other things will happen as well. Sometimes you will say things that people will find very humorous or even obscene, even though you did not mean it that way. Words can have double entendres even when you did not mean them to be offensive. Sometimes you have to just ignore it and keep going. Other times you have to say, "I did not mean it that way." Consider what will happen if your head is buried in your notes. You will not pick up on any of that. There is prudential judgment, pastoring, that is going on while you are preaching. I have said it before, and I mean it more than I am able to underline in this moment, but preaching itself is a redemptive event. If you believe that, then you will be very sensitive to what the Spirit is doing in the occasion. You cannot do that if you do not look at people. So the primary aspect of gesture is the eyes.

Another tool of gesture includes facial animation. How do we make our faces move? How do you make sure that people see the effect of the message on you? What is the best thing you can do to break up the flatness and somberness of your face? You just smile. I used to have to write it in my notes. I was so intense that people would ask me, "Why are you mad all the time?" I had to write in my notes, "Smile." I love the way Spurgeon teased young men to try to get them to do that. He said, "When you speak of heaven, let your face light up and be radiated with a heavenly gleam. Let your eyes shine with reflected glory. And when you speak of hell, well then your everyday face will do." He was saying that you are not speaking of hell all the time. So when you talk about joy, please look like it.

I have talked some about hands already, but let us talk quickly about them. What do you do with your hands? Keep them above the sternum and away from the body. Watch speakers who are very comfortable and those who are not. People who are uncomfortable in public address, even when they raise their hands, will keep their elbows in close to their body. It is signaling they are scared. People who are very comfortable will allow their elbows to come away from their body. Their gestures are above the sternum and away from the body. That is the natural thing to do. We keep our hands in a conversational line of sight. To keep our hands free, if we do not want them hanging at our side, we let them rest on the front of the pulpit. They are ready to gesture, and you will not even think about it. Your hands naturally do what they are saying. If you grasp and hold on to the pulpit with your hands, that undoes their readiness. You want them available for use. I have mentioned before having hands in the pockets. If you have your hands in your pockets, it signals that the situation is informal and you are at ease. The trouble with having your hands in your pockets is that they stop working for you. When people who are scared and nervous put their hands in their pockets, they start gesturing with their shoulders. Otherwise they stand like statues. It is very common for men in this culture today to have one hand in the pocket, one hand on the pulpit, and crossed legs. That locks you down. It keeps you from being affected by the dynamic of speaking. It can be effective to put one hand in your pocket if you want to communicate you are being casual or informal. It can have a purpose. Yet being locked down is not what you want.

Body motion is another element of gesture. Do not be afraid to move. There is much discussion about this. Some people are very concerned if you move outside the area of the pulpit because in their church, in their culture, the pulpit communicates the authority of the Word. Thus they do not like you to move away from the pulpit. Others in our culture, particularly the younger generation, want you to move away from the pulpit because they want the identification factor. What is right? Exegete the congregation. Exegete the culture. Make prudent and pastoral decisions. If I had my personal choice, I would not have pulpits. I recognize, however, that would not work in most congregations I go to. If they have pulpits that signal their respect for the Word, even though I would rather connect with people, I respect and honor their concern.

There are some standard rules for all gestures. You want to be free and frequent. I keep my hands free and typically gesture frequently. I would not advise you to actually do this, but the rule of thumb for public speaking is that two gestures for every sentence is the way to train. That does not mean you do it in every sentence. Men in this culture tend to stop moving. So if you are just practicing, the way to train is to use two gestures for every sentence. That will give you the habit of movement.

The second standard rule beyond being free and frequent is to expand or narrow gestures for the context. In a small Sunday school room you will narrow your gesture. In a large auditorium you will expand your gesture.

Common faults for all gestures include repetitive motions. Chopping, swaying, bouncing, or rocking back and forth is quite distracting. If someone notices it, then they cannot avoid seeing you do it. Once I have picked up that you are swaying, I cannot stop noticing that you are swaying. It becomes very distracting. All forms of clasping gestures are common faults. That includes holding your hands in front of or behind you. For men in this culture, it could be holding or twisting your wedding ring. Other faults are inadvertent gestures, which include touching your face or your hair. That is why we videotape sermons in class. It only takes one time of counting how many times you have licked your lips in one paragraph for you to realize you should stop doing it.

General rules for delivery are that we want to be as purposeful and as natural as possible. Those are the basic rules. We want to be as purposeful and as natural as possible. If it is purposeful, you will feel that

your manner and content are coming together. You can do things that even seem quite odd for public speakers. If you are trying to communicate something with it, however, then it can serve you well. Yet you also want to be natural. We are in an era when people expect us to be real, authentic, and personable. I usually speak more sedately in chapel sermons. Sometimes my students will say to me that I am much more animated in other places. I confess that is true. The seminary is an academic setting, and people tend to be more constrained. When I am out at churches in other places, I typically know that people are expecting more animation. I do not think about it. I am just reacting to what I know the context requires. I think you will do the same. As I look at 20 years of teaching guys to preach, my greatest concern for most guys who are trained in an academic setting is to help them become more natural in their animation. I want them to be more animated and enthusiastic. In seminary settings, we typically produce very scholarly messages. When you begin to pastor people, you begin to reach far more for their heart. The head does not get ignored, but we typically ignore or at least minimize the heart in academic settings and go after the head. When you are in a pastoral setting, you invert that. You do not ignore the head, but the heart becomes your greater concern.

I had the sad experience of following a man in the pulpit who had been there for 50 years. In the last 15 or 20 years, he wept in every sermon. Fifteen years later, the people laughed about it. It was too emotive. To show the feeling of deep emotion, including the ability to weep, is one thing. To not be able to control it, however, or even to seem to be manipulating by it is something else. To know one's own personality is key. If I know that something is going to be tender, then I want to prepare myself emotionally for it.

Earlier this fall I did a funeral sermon for a man who had been my worship leader for about 10 years. I could not stop crying. I felt bad about it, but I could not stop crying during the sermon. I loved him greatly. I do not remember ever being in a sermon in which that happened. I have wept at many funerals at which I preached, but that one touched me so deeply it was hard for me to stay in control. I recognized that I had to keep going. What I wanted to communicate was great care for the person but also the hope of the Gospel at the same time. That was very painful for me. Yet I wanted to say that even in my tears I know where this man is. I rejoiced in that even though I deeply grieved in the moment. I wanted to show both.

I wanted to show authenticity. That may sound like I am planning it. I do not even want to plan to be authentic. I just want to preach my heart. That is all I want to do. When I am doing that, there will sometimes be tears. Yet there will not always be tears. For those who are more sensitive of spirit, if you know there will be tears too often, then you have to prepare for that. You have to be aware that you cannot do it all the time.

As far as when to sit, stand, or kneel, I have sometimes sat when I preached, but then I had a broken leg. If you want to look back to the synagogue practice and make that normative, it would say stand when you read the Word and sit when you comment on it. Yet I do not know many people who do that. I do know people in very contemporary churches who take a stool up on the stage. They will never wear a coat and tie. They very much want to communicate informality. For those persons I would say that sitting occasionally and then standing up to make a point is something they are doing with some sense of what they are trying to communicate about identification. I return to the idea of knowing your people and knowing what you are accomplishing. To sit is going to communicate that you are not being very formal in the moment. If that is what you want to communicate, then it is fine to do it. Yet to say that you are being formal and serious and then to sit down will not communicate that in this culture.

## **Dress and Style**

Let me begin by telling a quick story. When I was pastoring a small rural church while I was in seminary, a man who was an elder made a motion at a session meeting. He said that none of the young men in our community who were beyond high school wore a coat and tie. He said that they buy a sport coat for their graduation, along with a tie, and that is the last time either is put on. That is until, of course, a funeral occurs down the road that they have to dress formally for. He said that we all come to church in coats and ties, which makes all the young men in our community uncomfortable when they come to our church. Thus he made a motion that none of the elders in the church will wear a coat and tie to church anymore.

I have another story from another church I went to some years later. I was working on my washing machine one Saturday morning. I was all greasy and messed up. I found out that I was missing a tool, so I went over to an elder's house. I knocked on the door, and he opened it. He looked at me and he said, "What are you doing visiting me looking like that." I said, "I am not visiting you. I am just coming to borrow a tool."

One of the elders in a church I served said, "We are too formal. We need to dress down." Another elder, with a different concern, said, "In this community, you are not formal enough. You need to dress up." Who was right? It is a trick question. They were probably both right. They were aware of the task, and they were aware of the people. They were trying to make prudential judgment for the sake of the Gospel, both concerning the sacredness of the task and the necessity of connecting with the people. As we talk about dress and style, that is what we are going to try to remember.

The goal for this lesson is to understand how messages can be delivered with greater effectiveness by considering how the preacher can identify with his congregation in dress and delivery. There is probably no better Scripture for this for us to consider than 1 Corinthians 9. Paul wrote, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible." Whose rights was Paul primarily concerned about? He was concerned about the rights of people who hear the Gospel and the right of the Spirit to minister to them. For that sake, he was willing to put his own rights second. For us in this culture, the great difficulty is when we begin to talk about things like style. When we dress, we typically only think in terms of "my rights" instead of considering to whom I am ministering and what will be most effective for their sakes and the sake of the Gospel.

As we think about styles of dress, the watchword is "appropriate." It must be appropriate to honor the task and identify with the people. There is an obvious and unending tension in those two things—to honor the task and identify with the people. What we are trying to do is to present ourselves appropriately for the situation. What do we have to consider? How am I going to dress so I can communicate the Word effectively? What do I have to take into account? I have to consider the people, but I have to consider how they are going to interpret the way I look. What are they going to use to make that interpretation? I have to consider their age or generation, which will be one thing they will use to interpret. I have to consider the societal context in which they are. That could be their socioeconomic level or their region of the country. It could be their nationality. It could be their demographics on the age spectrum. It could be their own history of what they expect men of God to look like to represent themselves. Are all of these societal standards good? Are they all bad? It is not necessarily so in either case. We have to make judgments that are pastoral for the sake of the people and the Gospel. Our judgments will not be for the sake of our own comfort. It is not our rights that are being defended, but it is their rights that we are concerned about.

Most of the time, the decisions that we make about dress and style are appropriate when they disappear. When it is not an issue, dress and style are appropriate. I typically know that my choices are inappropriate when how I am dressing becomes an issue. Is it possible that I might want it to be an issue? Are there times when I think the societal standards are inappropriate and I want to challenge them? Yes, that could very well happen. If that is my intent, however, then I should be aware of what some of the societal norms are. Otherwise I am just creating barriers that I do not intend. Remember that Paul said, "I want to put no stumbling block in the way of the gospel." You may want some people to question what they are doing. The elder who said he wanted us to stop wearing coats and ties was saying that we were becoming a barrier to young men coming into our church. He said he did not want us to put up a stumbling block. On the other hand, the other elder said that if you do not dress appropriately in my community, then the people will not hear you. He was aware of that stumbling block.

Having put all of those parameters in place, let us talk quickly about some of the things to be aware of as we present ourselves as a testimony to others in what we are doing. We are trying to avoid what is either uncaring or unkempt. What are some of the major issues that will always be? They will be hair, glare, and cost. Those will be the issues.

What will be the issues of hair? The issues will be how long it is on your head and where it is on your face. I am sorry, but it is just this culture. You may say, "But Jesus had a beard." Well, he probably did. If some of you have been salesmen, you have been told that you should not have facial hair. In this culture, beards communicate counter-culture in some way. They indicate that I am trying to be rebellious or I am trying to look older than I am or that I do not like dealing with people so I am reacting negatively to our societal norms. Moustaches, however, are different. At least in the Midwest, people will accept moustaches, but beards they will not. You might say, "That is unfair, and it is an unreasonable societal norm." I will agree with you, and maybe after a few years you can convince them of that. You make choices and you become aware of where society is. Regarding length of hair, you may wonder how long is too long. I do not know. In this culture, it is something people are concerned about.

With the issue of glare, I am talking about the paisley dinner jacket that you wear into the pulpit. What are the norms of what people expect in this culture? In the United States, if you are north of the Florida line and east of the Rockies, what do people normally expect the preacher to wear if it is not a Generation-X church? They expect a suit, at least on a Sunday morning. It will not be a sport jacket and slacks. It will be a suit and tie. What will be the color of the suit? It will be dark, and the tie will not have cartoon characters on it. That is, of course, unless you are the children's minister or the youth pastor. In that case, everything goes.

We can tease about it, but you have to consider whether you meant to make dress an issue or not. There are times when we need to make an issue about it. I so respect the elder who said he wanted us to stop wearing ties. He still wanted the preacher to wear a tie, but he did not want the rest of the elders to wear ties. He knew that in his community for the preacher not to wear a tie would cut his respect. On the other hand, in the Generation-X churches or Emerging churches, preachers typically do not wear ties. They are trying to connect to another aspect of society that is not familiar with church culture and does not have those expectations. This is the identification with people that moves a different way.

What are other issues of identification? To go into a poor community and wear a thousand dollar suit may be a problem. On the other hand, to go to an affluent community and wear the suit that your mom got you when you were in high school may be a problem as well. You may say that the affluent people need not judge people by their clothes, and the people in urban communities need not judge people by

what they wear. I recognize that, but are you trying to make it an issue? If you are trying to make it an issue and correct peoples' ideas, then more power to you. If you are just stepping on landmines that you do not know about and you do not intend, then it is better to adjust so that it is not an issue if you do not mean to make it an issue.

When I go into churches I do not know, I always button my coat. When I do not button my coat, in many communities it does not communicate informality, but rather it shows a lack of respect. If I do not button my coat, in many communities I go to there will be people who are mad at me, not for anything I have said, but simply because I did not show respect. It would be like wearing a hat in a church in many communities. You know not to do that. You may say, "Who cares?" Yet, although you and I know it is not something in the Bible, people are not going to hear us if we wear a hat into a formal worship setting. In some communities, the same will be true about buttoning coats and things like that.

We are talking about appropriateness. The issue of cost not only has to do with suits, but also with expensive jewelry and where your rings are. Your rings may not just be on your fingers but also on your ears or your nose or your eyebrows. I will grant you that there are some communities where that can be very effective. When my son began to minister in a downtown arts community, he said he had to wear a ring in his ear. He said, "I am white, blonde headed, and small. If I simply look like a suburbanite, then I will not work in this community. I will not be able to minister." He wanted to be able to identify with the people. I knew what he wanted to do, and he knew what he wanted to do to minister in that community. Now, however, it will be difficult for him to get a job in a suburban community.

Consider the drama of the communication event. Recognize that everything communicates something. Imagine that we have just finished the reading of the Word. I pray, "O Lord, my strength and fortress, You are my refuge in time of distress." Then I close my Bible, put it away, and say, "What I want to talk about today is..." All of the verses I am going to comment on may be in my notes. Yet what did I communicate? I communicated that we have dispensed with the preliminaries of the Bible, and now we are going to get to the important stuff, my message. I did not mean to say that. What I communicated by what I did, however, was a clear message. I am asking you to think about the fact that everything is a message. I want you to weigh that as you consider your responsibilities before the Lord.

Those responsibilities include being concerned about a style of delivery. I would encourage you, in this generation particularly, to develop a personal style. That means, first of all, do not be afraid to be self-revealing. I will tell you that this is a generation that virtually demands this. Two generations ago, to speak about yourself in the pulpit was anathema. Today, however, not to speak about yourself will itself deaden your ministry. It is the expectation. It is redemptive vulnerability. It is not simply saying, "I am a terrible person." It is rather saying, "We all struggle with this, but God helps." It is to identify with the struggle as you point to the hope of the Gospel. It is redemptive vulnerability.

Second, speak as though you are explaining something from across the kitchen table. Remember the quote about Spurgeon that he spoke to a thousand as though he spoke to one. If you can do that, if you can just talk to people in normal ways, they will long to hear you.

Third, speak to particular situations rather than to particular people. Come into their lives. Know them. Love them. Remember the way the Westminster Divines said it. They said, "By your conversation and residence with your people, know what you should be addressing."

Fourth, use the word "we" often. It is the "we" of direct address. Say, "We struggle with... We understand... We will be helped by..." To identify with people is a very personal style. That is not the

“royal we” of referring to yourself in the plural. Do not say, “Last week, we spoke to you about.” It sounds very arrogant. In order to involve people, say, “Last week, we understood that although we struggle with this, God has provided help.”

Use conversational speech. The rule of thumb is clarity increases as sentence length decreases. We cultivate a plain style by speaking in plain terms. I encourage you to look at 2 Corinthians 3, which says, “Seeing that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech.” I love that statement. Our hope is so important that we use great plainness of speech. It is entertaining to simply say things cleverly. It is impressive to say important things in a complex way. Yet it is ministry to say profound things in simple ways. It is also the greater intellectual task to say profound things in simple ways. It is not difficult to say profound things in complex ways, particularly using the vernacular that you learn in seminary. The greater intellectual task is to say profound things in very simple and graspable ways.

There are some principles for plain speaking. Use regular words. Remember that the Westminster Larger Catechism says in Question 159, “We are speaking to the necessities and the capacities of the people.” We are not speaking to the necessities of the people and the capacities of the preacher. The necessity and capacities of the people should guide us in our style.

Ultimately, we are trying to speak naturally. That does not mean we speak ungrammatically. If people are jarred by the language you are using, they will not hear you. Yet they are not looking for a formal essay. They are looking for you to be conversational, even as you speak with authority. That natural speaking is typically what is most wanted these days. It is being conversationally articulate.

We had some fun today in thinking about some aspects of delivery that are fun and even funny at times to think about. The reason I did that is I want you to remember something. We could have turned this whole course into a classroom on delivery and style. I want you to recognize that those are the lesser matters of preaching. They really are the lesser matters. What God calls you to do is to communicate well. Yet He says, “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.” That is our primary calling. It is to recognize that it is not our delivery, but rather it is the Holy Spirit working by and with the Word in peoples’ hearts. That is the profound task to which we are called.

Think about this: the angels are looking on, along with the departed saints. The Holy Spirit is present and working. Christ is interceding before the Father on behalf of you and the people. The Father Himself is listening to what you are saying, for the sake of His children. It is a profound task and a very good one. May God bless you in it as you, for the sake of His people and His Word, preach the Word. The Lord bless you.



## **Old Friends in New Clothes**

In this lesson, we take the next step forward. In Preparation and Delivery of Sermons, we used very formal forms of preparing sermons. We used the most formal form. We talked about how a proposition, or a main point, is a combination of a principle and an application. It is a universal truth in a hortatory mode. At the same time, we recognize that those long statements are boxy, and very few people actually preach that way. Even though you see them in my book and Haddon Robinson's book, you recognize that those long statements of principle and application are not ordinary speech. The reason we prepared that way was due to our location in the curriculum. Without having much exegesis and hermeneutics yet, we wanted to force you to simply look at a passage and consider what is true and what, with the authority of God's Word, you can tell somebody to do about it. By forming main points and propositions with principle and application, you are forced to think about what is true and what you must do about it.

But we want to take the next step. That next step is to consider how we take these formal forms and reduce them to more common language. The big picture is that we are basically going to chop them in half. We are going to talk about how we take those formal structures and do a fundamental reduction. What we are going to do this semester is teach you to preach with the fundamental reductions. You are still going to go through the process of a formal formulation of a proposition and main points. But when you preach, we want you to do the fundamental reduction so that the way you say things is more normal in the way you hear people preaching. That is the goal for this lesson.

In this lesson we will be talking about more outline forms. We are taking another step forward in structure. We will still be talking about principle and application. They will be the same old friends, but we will shorten their clothes, as it were. In converting traditional structures to short forms, let us first think of where we were before. When we looked at the formal forms, we said that in a principle-consistent outline, the principle stays consistent. For instance, if the principle is "Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation," then that principle would be in the proposition and all the main points. That means the anchor clause stays the same. That principle happens to be in consequential form. This is old, familiar material. We have even used this outline before, which says, "Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation, we must present Christ at every opportunity." It is principle consistent, so the application clause changes throughout the outline while the principle remains the same. That should sound familiar.

In talking about application-consistent outlines, we said very similar things. In an application-consistent outline, the anchor clause is the application. For instance, "Since Jesus alone provides salvation, we must present Christ at every opportunity. Since Jesus alone possesses salvation, we must present Christ at every opportunity. Since Jesus alone bestows salvation, we must present Christ at every opportunity." In an application-consistent outline, the application stays the same all the way through.

In the formal proposition and main point examples, the universal truth was in the hortatory mode. The universal truth was based in the text, with application based from the universal truth. The old formal proposition main point was always a combination of principle and application. I just gave examples of both principle-consistent and application-consistent outlines.

Now we can take the next major step, which is a fundamentally reduced outline. In a fundamentally reduced outline, the consistent clause, which is the anchor clause, becomes the proposition. That is the simplest way to say it. You part the statement in half, and whatever stayed the same becomes the proposition. Whatever changed become the main points.

If you were using the application-consistent outline, such as “Since Jesus alone provides salvation, therefore we must present Christ at every opportunity,” and you see that the application is staying the same, in a fundamentally reduced outline you delete the word “since,” and whatever stayed the same—“we must present Christ at every opportunity”—becomes the proposition. The anchor clause becomes the proposition alone. Then we will ask a question of the proposition. We talked before about interrogating the proposition. It is a standard way that people move through their outlines. They make a strong statement, and then they ask a question, and then they answer the question with what were developmental clauses, or magnet clauses. The clauses that were changing, still using parallel wording, now become the main points.

The simplest rule is that you take the long, formal wording of the proposition main point and chop it in half. Whatever was staying the same becomes the proposition. Whatever points were changing now become the main points. That happens whether you are dealing with application-consistent outlines or principle-consistent outlines. In the case of the example I just gave, the principle was staying the same, which was “Because Jesus is the only hope of salvation.” Thus, in the reduction, the proposition is “Jesus is the only hope of salvation.” Notice that the word “because” has been dropped out. The proposition is simply the anchor clause. Then you ask a question, and you begin to answer it with the application clauses that were changing.

There is a step-by-step conversion process, which simply repeats in a more elaborate way what I have just said about chopping the proposition in half. In the step-by-step conversion process, we are going to note which element—principle or application—remains consistent in the outline. That means we simply identify the anchor clause. Second, we develop the concept of the consistent element in the introduction and proposition.

In a fundamentally reduced outline of a principle-consistent outline, if the principle is “Jesus is the only hope of salvation,” I still have the same obligations. My introduction still has to prepare for the proposition in concept and terminology. My introduction still needs to prepare for the proposition. Let me give you an example of doing that.

When my brother was in high school, he was one of the finest Christians I had ever known. After high school he went into the military. He was stationed all across the world in various places. His particular branch of the military often involved him in negotiations regarding American technology with other international military leaders. That put him in locations around the world. Eventually it began to bother him a great deal that what he had been taught as a child, that Jesus is the only hope of salvation, seemed to excluded hundreds, thousands, and millions of people from salvation. Eventually he believed he could no longer affirm that. The fact that Jesus is the only hope of salvation became to him the aspect of the Gospel that he could no longer receive. My brother has gone through many stages of life. At that stage of his life he shared with many people, maybe some of you, that which is the most onerous part of Christianity. In a pluralistic world, we say that Jesus is the only hope of salvation. Yet if it is true, if Jesus is the only hope of salvation, what are the consequences?

Did you hear what I did? I used the statement “Jesus is the only hope of salvation” as the proposition. I prepared for it with an illustration, which was my brother’s experience. Having said the proposition, I asked an analytical question. I interrogated my own statement. I asked, “What are the consequences?” The answers are what would have been the developing side of the formal main points, the magnet clauses, such as, “We must present Christ in difficult situations.” If it is true that Christ is the only hope of salvation, then we must present Him to difficult people. We must present Christ despite our difficulties.

Let us consider the case of an application-consistent outline. In my example application-consistent outline, the proposition was “We must present Christ at every opportunity.” That was the anchor clause, the thing that was staying the same. I might prepare for that proposition in this way.

Some years ago my washing machine broke down. As a consequence, we needed to do our laundry at the local laundromat. I had not done that in a few years, but my wife stayed with our young children, and I went to do the laundry at the laundromat. While I was there doing my laundry at the laundromat, I was sitting down, reading my paper, and enjoying myself. Then somebody took his wet clothes out of the washing machine and put them into one of those coin-operated dryers. He put his coins in, pushed the button, and nothing happened. That person began to beat on the dryer, curse at it, and say, “If there is a God in heaven, why does He let these kinds of things happen?” Then he looked over at me and said, “Do you have an answer for that?” Of course, what I was thinking was, “Lord, I just came here to do my laundry.” Yet here was an opportunity to present the Gospel to someone. If there is a God in heaven, why does He let these kinds of things happen? It was the opportunity to present Christ. What the Bible is telling us is that we must present Christ at every opportunity. Why does the Bible say that? First, it is because Jesus alone purchased salvation.

After that you will get explanation, illustration, and application. Then I may ask the question again. Why else must we present Christ at every opportunity? It is because Jesus alone possesses salvation. That is followed by explanation, illustration, and application. There may be seven or eight minutes of material with that point. Then I might say again, “Why else must we present Christ at every opportunity?” It is because Jesus alone bestows salvation.

Notice the things that were happening. There is still strong parallelism in your main points. You retain the oral flag for the ear—here is another main point. You have key word changes. The parallel language helps identify the specific thing that each main point is going to be about. It is either going to be about how Jesus purchased salvation, possesses salvation, or bestows salvation. My subpoints are going to be about the specific wording of the magnet clause, just like it was before.

What we are doing, however, is throwing the anchor clause into the transition question. The way I said it was “What is another consequence of Jesus being the only hope of salvation?” Why else must we present Christ at every opportunity? Instead of saying that big, boxy, long statement, we are using the transition to ask a question and get ready for the next main point. It may be another, much shorter form of the proposition. Maybe I will not use the phrase “at every opportunity.” I am getting the proposition back in view during the transition by the use of the question.

Again, if you listen to pastors preach, you will find that they do this repeatedly. There will be a strong statement. Then they will ask question about it. Then they will answer the question with the main points. When one main point is done, you ask a similar question again. That gets the next main point in view. The way you keep tying the main point back to the proposition is with the question that links together the main points.

We are not saying that it is much different than what you have done before. It is actually not much different. It is what you have done before, yet it is taking the formal elements and putting them in more conversational language. That is the goal. We want to make it more conversational and presentable. In the step-by-step conversion process, we note which element—principle or application—remains consistent in the outline. That is, we identify the anchor clause. We develop the concept of the consistent

element in the introduction and proposition. Whatever that anchor clause is about, we will use the introduction to develop that anchor clause concept.

The third step is where things really begin to flow. We create an analytical question, or implicational questions, based on the consistent element. That is, we interrogate the proposition. We ask who, what, when, where, why, and how. What are the consequences? What else should I do? We interrogate that proposition.

The fourth step is that we answer the questions with the developmental clauses. They become the main points. One hint is that, to enhance unity and flow, the anchor clause reappears in the transition between main points as the analytical question. For instance, I asked, “What is another reason that we should proclaim Christ in all situations?” Another example would be “What is another implication of knowing Christ as Lord over all of life?”

While there could be a complicated way of doing this, the main idea is that you are still using both a principle and an application. You can still do that as you create an outline in your preparations. What you should preach, however, is not that long statement. Take those long statements, chop them in half, and whatever was staying the same becomes the proposition. Whatever was changing then will become the main points. The way you set up those main points is with analytical questions.

You will also answer other questions as part of the process of preaching. I did not give you any subpoints. Certainly the subpoints would have to be answering question such as “Why is He the only hope? or “What are the consequences of Him being the only hope?” There will have to be other questions that are answered by the points that He bestows and He possesses and so on. There are other questions in the sermon, but all I have shown you are the main points. You will have to answer further questions in order to be consistent with what that story was setting up. All I am asking you to do so far is to structure your main points according to the system I have explained. That would not be a complete sermon, however, if that is all you did.

When we used those long statements before, it seemed kind of unnatural. Even though it forced us hermeneutically to say what the text said, we are now moving toward a more conversational type of presentation. You will still be doing the same thing, however, in terms of thinking through the process.

There are some results of using reduced forms. First, a principle-consistent outline in reduced form will have a principle for the application, because that was the anchor clause, and applications for the main points. The proposition will say what is true, and the main points will say what to do. That may be more complicated than it needs to be said. The idea is that if your proposition is a principle, then all of your main points will automatically be applications. If your proposition is an application, then all of your main points will automatically be principles. In essence, the application will stay the same, and you will be answering the questions “Why should we do that? What is another reason we should do that?” That is the pattern for an application-consistent outline.

Here is a hint: whatever the proposition is, whether principle or application, the main points are the opposite. For example, if my proposition is “Jesus is the only hope of salvation,” then my main points cannot be “Jesus alone bestows salvation” or “Jesus alone possesses salvation” or “Jesus alone purchased salvation.” The first statement, “Jesus is the only hope of salvation,” is a principle. All of those other statements, “Jesus bestows, Jesus possesses, and Jesus purchased,” are also principles. They go with another outline somewhere. We cannot have principles and principles. Whatever the proposition is, the main points are the opposite. Will we always preach that way? No, but we are at a certain place in

the curriculum in which we say what is true and what to do about it. We are thinking in those terms in the way that we form things now.

The second point is just the opposite. In an application-consistent outline, we will have an application for the proposition and principles for the main points. The proposition will say what to do, and the main points will say what is true. That is, the main points will give the reasons for why to do the application.

There are goals for using these short forms. One is that the main points will hopefully be more concise and memorable. Earlier on, we said that the sign of a good proposition or main point is that it passes the 3:00 AM test. It will be brief. In contradiction to that, however, we formed long main points and propositions. Now we are trying to shrink those down and be more consistent with our own principles when we can. Main points should be concise and memorable.

Second, subpoints will still support or prove their specific main point. Subpoints will still be about what the magnet clause was. Subpoints will still be about their specific main point.

Third, and perhaps most important to remember, we still want to rain key term changes from the subpoints to tell the illustration and form the application. My sense is that after this lesson you will be glad that you can finally word main points more naturally. The thing that is often difficult at this stage, however, is to maintain the principle of using key words from the subpoint statements in the illustrations and applications. That is usually the more difficult thing to do. It has not changed from previous lessons. Make sure you continue to use expositional rain. Use the key words from the subpoints in the illustrations and applications.

What we are dropping are the “if” and “then” terms. We are not using the “because” and “therefore” terms. Those terms are implied. Simply by saying, “Jesus is the only hope of salvation,” and asking, “What are the consequences?” you have implied the “because.” You drop the term “because” in order to shorten the language. The question that you ask about the statement will automatically imply whether you are using a conditional or consequential concept. It is so much more conversational this way.

You may write out a full manuscript before you preach, but if you preach from a full manuscript, you will end up reading it. The goal is to write out a full manuscript. Before you write out that manuscript, you should have prepared a formal outline with at least proposition and main points. Then write out the manuscript, but what you preach from should be a pulpit outline. The pulpit outline includes whatever it takes for you to preach the message with prompting. For most of you, it will probably be two to three pages of outline material that prompts you in what you want to say. The manuscript helps you get prepared. The pulpit outline hopefully helps you preach freely. Some people use a broadcast-style outline. They put the manuscript on two-thirds of the page and the outline on a third of the page. They use the outline as much as they can, but they have the manuscript if they need it. Others will use a one-page fold, which has the introduction, first, second, and third main points, and the conclusion. That is a standard way that preachers put their outlines together.

Should you allow freedom for the Holy Spirit to work when preaching a sermon? Yes, definitely. The notion of Robert Murray M’Cheyne was that he wanted to write out a manuscript in order to prepare carefully what he wanted to say. Then he would put his manuscript aside and speak freely as empowered by the Holy Spirit. There is a gentle mix. You can be under-prepared and therefore not confident in what you want to say. You can also be over-prepared and practically stiff in what you are trying to say. There is a dynamic middle ground in being very prepared, very sure of yourself, so that when you see somebody is not getting it, then you can repeat it. You can also develop your own sense of when you are

saying something so important that you need to focus on that topic more than you anticipated. I have the wonderful advantage of being able to preach sermons in many different places, but they are never the same. I am always reading people. I am always feeling the dynamics of the people. The church situations are always different.

A pulpit outline is not simply a listing of propositions, main points, and subpoints, but rather an organized presentation of all your material that allows you to see at a glance—usually in one to three pages—what you intend to say about the entire passage. A good rule of thumb is to keep main points segregated on different points of the pulpit outline so that your eye always knows where the next main point starts. If you want further tips on preparing extended pulpit outlines, look at *Christ-Centered Preaching*, pages 334-336.

## **Word and Spirit**

In this lesson, we want to talk about how the Word and Spirit function in preaching and how we properly honor them as we preach. We want to be workmen who are well approved and well prepared for the task. Ultimately, we want to be men who are on our knees and thinking of our dependence on what God provides for us. Our goal for this lesson is to consider approaches to preparing messages that keep preachers true to the priorities of the Word and Spirit. We have not talked about that much yet because it is often intuitive. It is what we expect of someone who preaches from the Word. How do you say you are more concerned about the Word than the words that you say? How do we communicate that when we preach? Here are some ideas to keep in mind.

First, preach from an open Bible. That may sound obvious. There are certain caricatures in our society that are well known. When you watch Billy Graham, he always has a large black Bible whose pages droop over his hand as he holds it. His classic phrase is “The Bible says.” As simple as that may be, it is also powerful, not only in culture but to the human heart. Such a statement communicates that this is not what I am saying, but the Bible says it. We may be tempted to read our passage and then close our Bible when we finish reading. What do we communicate when we do that? Now that we are done with God’s Word, we are ready for the important stuff, my sermon. The ability to communicate what I want you to hear is out of this open Bible. It has more import in my mind than what I am saying. Thus I am basing whatever I say on this Bible. It does not close. The expositor’s ethic is to tell what the text says. It is a visual clue, and you are saying that, with the tools in front of you, the Bible is of prime importance. Simply keeping the Bible open while you preach is one way, in this culture, to communicate the importance of the Word.

What about issues like modern Power Point presentations? Typically, even in churches that use Power Point presentations for people to look at while the Scripture is being read, the preacher is still reading from a Bible. Some of the more noteworthy preachers who are appealing to younger audiences have been known to take their computer into the pulpit and preach from the laptop. Most have stopped doing that. They recognize that even in a modern culture, our sense is that the Word is what is represented on the pages here. You and I both know that an electronic representation of the Word is just as good as any other. Yet there is something powerful about indicating that the Bible does not close while I preach. While I preach, the Bible stays open.

A second way to emphasize the priority of the Word is to refer to the text often during the sermon. You can simply follow the pattern we have talked about before: state, place, prove. State an idea. Then place it, which is to locate where in the text it is. When you state, place, and prove it, it takes people back to the Word repeatedly. So you say, “Look with me at verse 3.” Or, “Look at verse 2.” In this culture the ability to say, “It is not me. This is what the Word says.” is very important.

Another way to emphasize the importance of the Word is to point people to helpful parallel passages. This can be overdone. Early on in this class, we talked about preaching that amounts to “let me show you that I have used my concordance in preparing this message.” You go from one text to another to another and another. The classic line from a preacher of a congregation that is always looking for another passage is “Oh, how I love to hear those leaves turn.” Yet it can ultimately be distracting. Instead of making a point about what this text says, you are just saying that there are more texts that you can tell them about. People lose the sense of where they are.

There are other problems in this culture in this day if you are referring to numerous texts outside your central text during the sermon. Many people simply do not know where the texts are. So they just give up and tune out. You will be in many different church settings. Some will go to church settings that are highly traditional and well schooled. Some of you will not be in that kind of church. Some of you will vary throughout your ministry career. You may start out in traditional churches, and then you may begin ministry to people who are rather unchurched. It is a tact and prudence issue.

One thing that makes people nervous is when you say, “Look where this word is also used.” Then you turn to another text or parallel passage. It makes people nervous when you cannot find it. It is not that you do not know where it is. For most of us, when we begin preaching, we do know where John 3:16 is, but with 100 people looking at me, I cannot quite get there quickly. I find it helpful to often use little sticky notes in the passages that I want to turn to. Then my concentration is not broken while I am trying to find the page. I can be engaging people while they are finding the page. Then I am not worried about whether I can find the text. There was a time when I used paper clips on the bottom side of my Bible, so that I could turn to the page without trouble. If people see many paperclips on your Bible, however, they may get concerned. Now I use sticky notes, and I can turn directly to the page while I keep talking. I often even mark with pencil in my Bible where I am going to be reading from. It can be a problem if you are teaching a Sunday school class or preaching and someone hands you a different Bible from the one you have been preparing with. Your eye has been trained where to look on the page, so it may be difficult to find the passage. So the idea of marking the passage is that people will not be nervous that you cannot find the text. While taking people to parallel passages says something about your priority, your ability to find the text also says something about your priority.

Another way to indicate your concern for the priority of the Word is to allow people time to find the passage before you read from it. If I am saying, “Look with me at this passage,” and then I begin talking, what I am really saying is that I do not expect people to find it. It is not really important that they find it. If we take people to parallel passages, we should follow some of the same principles as the reasons we develop Scripture introductions. Scripture introductions are useful for giving the context and creating longing, but it also has the pragmatic benefit of giving people time to get to the text. If we just start talking right away, we are basically saying that it is not important that they read along. Giving people time to find the text before we read it is encouraging to people to read the text.

In recent years I have begun to do something that I wonder if your pastors are doing as well. I encourage people to read the text with me. Have you done that? I find that very powerful these days. I am not only saying, “Look with me,” but I am also saying, “Read with me. What does it say?” I actually have them read a clause with me that makes my point. They cannot miss the point. They feel the impact of the passage if the words come out of their mouth. I confess that I was not taught to do that. I have observed other preachers doing it, and I have felt their people want to do it. They are engaged with the text. They are given time to find it. They feel the weight of it. Occasionally, therefore, it is appropriate to ask people to read the text with you. I am not just talking about before the sermon. Even within the sermon, when you want them to catch important details, it is appropriate to ask them to read part of the text with you.

The next way we can show the import of the text is to read it meaningfully. For many of us, if we are only preparing academically, only preparing our message in our studies, even if we practice our message, one of the things we often do not do is to practice the reading of our text. Yet that is the first major thing we are going to say to people after the Scripture introduction. Reading the text meaningfully involves reading the text ahead of time. That way you know there is a question mark or exclamation point. It will not surprise you. You are prepared for it. Certain words are difficult to say together.



How do we read the Word meaningfully? That question relates to that voice you hear in your head when you think of what preaching is. What does it mean to read the text meaningfully? For this generation in particular, it is neither reading sentimentally nor theatrically nor with stained-glass preacher tones. A text like Luke 18:1, which says, “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up,” can be read in a slow, deliberate, and oratorical style. That style, however, is a put-off these days. There was a time, however, when reading Scripture in a very oratorical style was part of honoring it. Today such a style is viewed as a caricature, so it seems to dishonor Scripture. So we should not read sentimentally nor theatrically nor with stained-glass preacher tones.

We should read at a conversational pace. We should also let voice and intonation reflect content and meaning. The primary way of doing that, which is very important, is to emphasize verbs and modifiers. A verb almost always carries the action or thrust of the sentence. Simply emphasizing the verbs is going to help your intonation carry the content of the passage. Emphasizing modifiers is also important. If you say the sentence, “He was a big man,” it will change the meaning if you emphasize the word “big” or if you do not emphasize it. The adjectives often carry the nuance of a sentence, whereas the verbs carry the thrust of it.

Consider Luke 18:1 again. What carries the meaning in that verse? What words would you want to emphasize with your voice? The modifier “always” is an important word. The verb phrase “not give up” will also be important to emphasize. The idea is not to speak theatrically and emphasize those words as though you were on stage. The idea is that if you were in a conversation with someone, those words carry the point that you want to make.

Now consider Luke 18:2, which says, “He said: ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men.’” What words would you emphasize if you were going to read that verse? You want to emphasize the verbs “feared” and “cared about.” It is those verbs that will carry the meaning of the verse. What we are trying to do is restore natural speech. That is all we are trying to do. We are trying not to be theatrical. And we are trying not to be flat. The idea is, if I were talking to someone, or if these verses were Luke talking to you, how would he have said it? We are trying to repeat that supposed conversational tone.

Your reading can engage people, or it can put them off. You must realize that your reading of your text is your first interpretation. As people are asking, “What does this text mean?” the way that we read it is actually interpreting the text. When reading the passage from Luke 18, for example, there are words that make the point, and so I must say them as best I can. There are people who are great preachers but poor readers. As far back as Broadus, he said there were more great preachers than there are great readers of texts. By that he means that there is something that is curious about our theology. We dispense with the text so we can get to our sermon. Instead we should think that the text itself has the power to transform, and it is the first sermon. Reading the text is explaining it to people as we go. If we think of it in those terms, it helps.

Here are some tips for reading. Practice out loud for sentence breaks, punctuation surprises, and punctuation problems. Use the Scripture introduction to prepare listeners for surprises and difficulties. What kind of surprises might be in the text? There might be difficult terms or difficult names. When I went to a town in southern Illinois to preach, the people there told me that their preacher had taught them who “Artax-Eraxus” was. I had no idea who that was. Over time I learned that was Artaxerxes. Yet a generation had grown up calling him “Artax-Eraxus.” Part of the difficulty is that different generations and different translations will articulate the words differently. If you pronounce the book in the Bible,

Habakkuk, with an emphasis on the middle syllable, then you say it the way the King James Bible articulated it. In Hebrew classes today, however, you are taught that the emphasis is on the last syllable, which makes the name sound quite different. In our culture, this is a difficult time. Those people who are 50 years and older, even if they are reading the New International Version Bible, their ears hear the King James pronunciation. Of course, there are also people who do not know the pronunciation of words and names one way or the other. In this culture, most people do not know how to pronounce a name like Artaxerxes or Gilead. One way you can learn the way that people pronounce those names who do know them is to look at a King James Bible. The King James still puts accent marks on the vowels, so it will help you learn how many people are accustomed to pronouncing terms. It is part of preparing to read to not be surprised by names.

In your Scripture introduction, you can also mention new ideas that are going to be introduced. You can introduce new background, new contexts, or new twists. If you are going to skip verses, you will want to announce it in your introduction. If you skip a verse while you are reading through your passage, everyone will think that either you did not see it, your eye slipped, or you were afraid of it. If you are going to combine passages, then you also want to mention that. People are still confused when the reading goes across a chapter division. You may well know that the chapter and verse divisions are not scriptural or originally inspired, but it throws people when you stop in the middle of a verse in your Scripture reading or if you go across a chapter division. People might think you do not know what you are doing. It helps to train people during the Scripture introduction so that they know what you are doing and why you do it.

Another interesting hint for reading effectively is to read about delicate matters in more appropriate translations or with unconcerned matter-of-factness. For example, the King James Version has the phrase “bowels of mercy” in Colossians 3:12. In this culture that expression would be met with snickers. The New International Version simply says “compassion.” The idiom has changed to be more appropriate. There are other kinds of delicate matters. For example, Onan spilled his seed on a rock. The teenagers may know what that means, and they may snicker. On the other hand, those who are 3 years, 5 years, or 8 years old do not know what you just said. If you get red-faced and flustered, then everybody will be concerned. Yet, it is in the Bible. There are examples of everything you can think of in the Bible, including incest, rape, and people who have their bowels gushing out. That was one of my son’s favorite verses when he was growing up. The knife went in all the way and the fat overflowed the hilt. There are things you can talk about in the Bible that if you get flustered about, it will fluster others. An attitude matter-of-fact attitude that says, “This is what the Bible says,” can get you through almost anything.

Another tip is to practice reading meaningfully to children. One way to determine if your Scripture reading is engaging is to find out if you can hold your children’s attention as you read the Scripture.

Another way of indicating the priority of the Word is to give respect before or after you read it. It is more common now than any other time that I can remember that preachers say certain words either before or after they read the text. It is a way of saying, “I want you to know the respect I have for the Word.” You hear pastors say many different things. One thing they say is to simply ask people to stand during the reading of the Word, to show respect for it. That was a pattern that we know happened in the synagogue. They might simply say, “Listen carefully to what the Word of God says.” They are identifying it as the Word of God. We are in an era in which liturgical practices are rising, particularly among younger preachers who appreciate them. So you may hear things like, “This is the Word of God.” To that the people will respond, “Thanks be to God.” That may be after the Word. An older generation would say, “Thus far, the Word of God.” That means, “I have read the Word, now these are my words.” I never felt comfortable saying that. It said that the Spirit may not be speaking through me now, whereas

I think He is if I have prepared accurately to preach the truth. Yet I understood the sense that “That was the Word of God. Now human words are coming.” I understood the ethic, yet I felt uncomfortable saying it. I felt very comfortable saying, “This is the Word of God” and having the people say, “Thanks be to God.” Another thing to say is “Let us read together God’s holy and inerrant Word.” That is another way of announcing what it is we are about to read.

Another way we show the importance of the Word to us is we pray, either before we read or after we read the Word. That praying sets it off in importance in our minds. The reason we do all of this is that, if you are like me, I am so focused on what I am about to say that the reading of the Word becomes perfunctory. So we emphasize this in order to say that the reading itself is a type of exposition and interpretation.

Sometimes it is a way of studying the Word itself. You may read it out loud before you start doing your sermon research. That will allow you to actually hear what it is saying. You can practice being a first-century Christian. You can hear the words coming out of your own mouth and hear what meaning those words are carrying. You can realize again that the reading itself is an exposition and interpretation. The old saying of the preaching masters is that “Preaching is always the second sermon.” The reading of the Word is the first sermon.

Another reason to emphasize the reading of the Word is that ever more people are dependent on the public reading. We can say that is a fault of our culture. As you read, they often do not read along with you. In the early church, however, one person read the epistle and everyone else listened. It does not mean we are especially bad today. Yet we are ever more in a culture in which you will minister to more unchurched people. It helps to recognize that when I am reading people are looking at me. They may not be reading the text. To them it may be an awful, mystical, labyrinth book that is difficult to get through. As I read it, they are often looking at me. As more people are dependent on the public reading, one of the things that I would encourage you to think about doing is to ladle the text with your eyes. Do you know how you ladle soup? You go in and out of the pot. As I read the verse, I look up as much as I can. I am trying to engage those who are looking at me. I have done this in hundreds of settings. I will tell you that in very traditional churches probably two thirds of the people are looking down. Yet even in the most traditional church, a third of the people are looking at me. The way I keep engaging them, saying, “This is important,” is that I keep looking up at them, as though I am speaking to them what the text says. Quite candidly, I would rather that they were looking at the text. Yet my primary concern is that they not forget the text or not listen at all. I keep trying to engage them with my eyes.

Another reason to emphasize the importance of the Word is that it reflects your own theology of the Word. You believe the Word is able to change people eternally and that it is the source of authoritative truth. The reason we preach from an open Bible, try not to stumble over words unnecessarily, try to read meaningfully, try to say the Scripture is more important than the words I will say, is that we know what the Bible says, “Blessed is he that reads and they that hear the words of this book.” It is the Word of God that is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. We could repeat the stories many times of the person who simply read the Scripture and the Spirit moved their heart to conversion. There is the person who simply heard John 3:16 repeatedly, but it was read in such a way, with such heart by the pastor, that it finally broke through. Believing that the Word of God itself is one of God’s instruments for change helps us read it with due import.

I not only want to talk about the importance of the Word but also the priorities of the Spirit. These are not going to be new ideas for you, but I want them to come in a way that I hope impresses you with the

importance of being on your knees before you preach. That can be difficult to do. You prepare so well and so long, and you may be rushed before you go. I sometimes say, “Lord, forgive me, I did not get on my knees before the sermon.” I do not say that as though it is magical if you get on your knees. Yet if the Spirit is not operating in your preaching, then you are doing absolutely nothing.

Something to remember is that preaching is itself a redemptive event. When Jesus prayed, He said, “Lord, sanctify [which means make holy] these disciples by truth. Your Word is truth.” I wonder if you have thought about that. We often think that people will hear a sermon and then afterward they will remember and act on what we have said and that will be the sanctifying process. That certainly happens. What I think we forget, however, is the power of the Spirit in the moment. While someone is preaching, have you never been convicted by the Spirit? I have been doing what I know is not right. I have been arrogant before God. I have not listened to His Word. In academic settings, in which we are training with information so that we will respond to it later on a test or employ it in our ministries later on, we can forget that this very moment is redemptive. As I am speaking, the Holy Spirit is changing people right now. He does not just do it out of memory, but also by what is being said in this moment.

So it is not simply thoughts from mind or memory, but also the things we read or say in the sermon are words of life that come by the Word of life. Consider how Paul says it in 1 Thessalonians. He said, “We also thank God continually because when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the Word of men, but as it is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” The Word is at work as it is being preached, as it is being proclaimed. To me that is both a powerful and intimidating thought. As I am speaking to people, the Spirit is now working in them. He is not waiting for them to apply it, but right now He is taking His scalpel and His forceps and working on the heart, even as I am preaching. That is what the Spirit is doing right now.

The reason for this, in ways that astound us, is that the Bible is presenting, even as I am speaking, Christ as the speaker and God as the audience. Often in the worship wars, we make the point to remember that God is the audience of worship. That is true. What we sometimes forget when we are preaching is that not only is God the audience, but also Christ is the speaker. If I am being true to His Word, if what I am saying right now is true to His Word, then Christ is speaking through me to His people. Remember the words of Calvin, “God has so chosen to anoint the lips and the tongues of His servants that, when they speak, the voice of Jesus comes out.” That is an amazing dynamic. God is both audience and speaker in the process of preaching.

I have been in situations that you will be in at times in which I am facing angry people. They may be angry at me or at something the church has done. It is freeing to say to myself, “Lord, let me preach to You. Be my audience now. Do not be ashamed of what I say. Let me speak to you.” It works both ways. “Let me speak as though Christ were speaking to His Father. Persecution, difficulty, anger, and embarrassment may all be here, but be my audience above all these people and let me speak as Your Son. Let me not know Your reproach from the way I speak this day. Let me speak to you as Your own Son would.”

The familiar words from 2 Peter are “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of men, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” That is first saying what we are working with, which is Spirit-inspired text. That is where we are starting. Augustine said the famous phrase, “Where the Bible speaks, God speaks.”

What is the Holy Spirit doing? In John 16 we hear the words of Jesus, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you in all truth.” So He has not only given truth, but He also guides in truth. What

is He going to say? Jesus goes on to say, “He will speak only what he hears.” The Spirit is only going to speak what He hears. Jesus then says in verse 14, “He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.” The insight is that the Spirit is speaking to His people, but the Spirit only says what comes from Christ. If the Spirit is taking my Words and working in His people, the Spirit is only taking what has been given to Him by Christ. In the Trinity economy, even though we do not want to be too strict about assigning categories, the Father is the One who wills, the Son is the One who performs, and the Spirit is the instrument. The Spirit is still the instrument in the process, but He is only speaking what God has given Him through Christ to say. The words that are coming by virtue of the Spirit are Christ’s own words. The Spirit’s testimony is of Christ. And the Spirit’s testimony is from Christ.

Therefore we can say with Paul that “In the presence of God in Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing in His kingdom, I give you this charge: preach the Word.” That is one of those wonderful places in Scripture in which Paul is making a pun. In the presence of Christ, who is the Word of God, preach the Word of God. When we are preaching, we are actually preaching Christ to His people. It humbles you. In this moment, just as a sacrament mediates the presence, power, and promises of God to His people, so preaching is functioning so that I am now mediating Christ to His people by the truth of His Word. His Spirit is working, and Christ is now present in the work of His Spirit because the Spirit does nothing apart from Christ. It is the testimony of Christ that is being communicated. I do not want to overstate it, but Luther’s theology of Christ was that I am now Christ to these people. By the proclamation of His Word, I am Christ to these people. With all my weaknesses and all my sin, to the extent that my words are truly His Word, I am Christ to these people.

How does that happen? The Word was made flesh. Paul takes that to new heights when he says that preaching makes Christ’s ministry present. Midway through 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul says, “For the message of the cross is the power of God.” Later Paul says, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” The message of God is the power of God to save. When I preach, God’s power now comes. It is not my preaching, but His power now works to save.

We are told that in His appointed season He brought His Word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior. Paul said that we have moved from darkness to light, but the Word of light came by preaching. People were moved from darkness to light by the power of God by preaching.

What that means is we become co-creators of a new creation. God spoke, and the world came into being, but we are new creatures in Christ Jesus. We are new creations. As God spoke His Word and brought the world into being, so the preaching of His Word is creating a new creation. We become co-creators of the spiritual renewal of all things by the preaching of the Word. It astounds us to think that when Paul says “all things are being worked together for good for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose,” that God is taking, by the prayers and the working of His saints, all of creation and retooling it, re-bending it sovereignly, by the actions of His saints, so that now all things work together for good. Creation is being changed by our prayers, and new creation is being made by our preaching. We are co-creators of a new creation by the power of the Spirit.

How do we do that? John 17:18 says that we as proclaimers become one with the Father and the Spirit. Jesus said to the Father in His High Priestly Prayer, “As You sent me into the world I have sent my disciples into the world.” Then in the next verse He says, “So that the world may believe that You have sent me I have given them the glory that You gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and

you in me.” By proclaiming the truth, we actually unite with the Father and the Son. We become one with God in the proclamation of truth. We are co-creators, one with Him, in the purpose of that new creation.

Peter states the idea powerfully. “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God. The Word of God stands forever, and this is the Word that was preached to you.” You have been born again by the Word. That Word will stand forever. It is what has been preached to you and what you now have to preach. All this is saying is that preaching is a supernatural event. You may say, “Of course.” Yet with all we have said about structure, delivery, presentation, and reading the Bible well, they are techniques that mean nothing if we do not remember that there is something supernatural that has to occur, or else it is all done in the flesh. It would have no more significance than any other carnal thing that we do.

Preaching is a supernatural event. Some have compared it to fire and wax. The preacher is bringing fire to melt the listener so that God can mold as He intends. We tend to be more concerned to perform our part creditably than we are about God’s mighty involvement in our efforts. We tend to be hungrier for success than we are for overpowering. God made it clear to Zerubbabel that the task of rebuilding the temple would be accomplished “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.” As someone has said, never allow yourself to feel the equal to your work. Do not say, “I can do this now. I have had Preparation and Delivery of Sermons.” Never allow yourself to feel the equal to your work. If you ever find that spirit growing in you, be afraid.

There are times, usually when I am very tired at the end of a conference or long trip, when I am asked to preach, and I get up and am not nervous. Then I say to myself, “You are not nervous. There is a problem here. You are about to bring the Word of God to His people. Christ is about to speak through you. Yet this has not gotten your adrenaline going at all.” I know at some point in my tiredness that I have begun to think, “I can do this. I will call on a past message. I can do this.” It is a danger if you ever begin to believe you are up to the task.

Historically, preachers have talked about the need for unction. That is an old-fashioned word that means the working of the Spirit. The word “unction” does not appear in most modern translations. The only place that you might see it is in 1 John 2:20 in the King James, which says, “But you have an unction from the Holy One and you know all things.” Curiously, it is not particularly applied to preaching but rather to the understanding of the disciples. It is saying that you have something from on high, something that you could not provide. Through the history of preaching, that word unction was applied to preaching to refer to something that you cannot provide. You need something from on high. If this is a supernatural event, then there needs to be supernatural intervention.

That concept is expressed in various verses. First Thessalonians 1:5 says, “Our gospel came to you not only with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, with deep conviction.” In Luke, Jesus is recorded as saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has appointed me to preach good news to the poor [notice what the Spirit does in that preaching] to proclaim freedom, to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” That is an interesting task that the Spirit is involved in.

The traditional way to think about unction in preaching circles is that it means the anointing of the Holy Spirit on a sermon so that something holy and powerful is added to the message that no preacher can naturally generate, no matter how great his skills. Do you ever get to the point of thinking, “What will I feel like if at some point in life I have the world’s acclaim for being a great preacher and yet I do not know if I have done anything spiritually?” They may say, “You are so easy to listen to. I am moved

when you speak. You are so articulate.” What people say about you can carry you for a few years. I find that the pastors who pastor for 20, 25, 30, or 40 years, however, are the ones to whom people say, “The Lord used you, and the Spirit convicted me. I was changed supernaturally by how the Lord used you.” I think that will be the only thing that will carry you for the long term.

What is necessary for unction when we preach? The Puritan divines talked about three things that are necessary for unction. They are illumination, conviction, and assimilation. Illumination is not a surprising idea. It is simply revealing the meaning and purpose of the Word. You need to be able to understand the Word and say what it says. Illumination is simply saying what the Word says accurately. John 14:26 says, “When the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name comes, He will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said.” To teach is having understanding and insight into what the Scriptures say. To remind is when the Spirit reminds us what is appropriate for the present task.

I will explain this in a couple of ways. Illumination involves understanding the Word, which anyone can do in the flesh, to an extent. If you say, “Tell me what *luo* means,” anyone can tell you that it means “to loose.” Anyone can understand that logically. Yet if you ask, “What does it mean to be loosed from my sin and to really understand it?” That is part of the Spirit’s preaching. A couple of years ago I heard a pastor whom I greatly respect say in a prayer, “Lord, lift Your hand from the page, because if You do not lift Your hand, I cannot see what is there.” I understand that prayer at a deeper level than I can explain to you. He did not mean he could not see the words on the page. He did not mean he could not rationally or cognitively make sense of what they say. He was saying he could not really understand its impact on his life or its import to the people to whom he was speaking if God did not allow him to see what it mean for that moment in his peoples’ lives. Lord, by Your Spirit teach me what this means for us today, my heart first and then these people, and remind me.

I cannot fully explain my understanding. I believe that when the Holy Spirit is working in my preparation for preaching and when I preach, in ways that I cannot fathom, He is bringing to mind things that I would not have thought of had He not been active. I may not have thought of a certain person in a certain situation. I might not have thought of how this verse particularly reflects a struggle that affects our church today. Those thoughts would not have come together. I am reminded how this truth from that text is related to an experience from my childhood with that text and it is brought to mind in a way that is appropriate for this moment in my ministry. I believe the Spirit controls that. Part of unction is teaching what the Word says and being reminded appropriately of what it says at the right times.

Some idea of the Spirit aspect of understanding is powerfully presented in 1 Corinthians 2:14. It says, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to Him. He cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” Again, someone can rationally understand the text. Yet spiritually, at a heart level, those things cannot be understood apart from the Spirit.

Let me review some common questions. Does the Bible support an emphasis on the Spirit’s power in our preaching? You know it does. In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul says, “My message, my preaching, were not with wise and persuasive words, but with demonstration of the Spirit’s power so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom but on God’s power. God has revealed the riches of God’s wisdom to us by His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.” This is not something human that we do. Paul goes on to say, “We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”

Thus one of the things that the Spirit does is simply illumine us to the truth and significance of His Word, both by teaching us its meaning and by reminding us appropriately what needs to be brought to bear.

Another thing the Spirit does as part of unction is to bring conviction. Jesus said in the High Priestly Prayer, “I tell you the truth, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him, because when He comes He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment.” Here is what we can do: we can make people feel guilty. Yet we cannot make people feel dependent on the cross of Christ apart from the work of Spirit. The Spirit convicts people of sin. He shows them what is wrong. The Spirit convicts people of righteousness. He shows them what is right. The Spirit convicts them of judgment. He shows them what is ahead, both in terms of Christ’s victory and Satan’s demise.

This is a different concept. Illumination is what unction is required for the preacher. Conviction is the required work of the Spirit for the hearer. I not only need the Spirit to understand, but also I require the Spirit for true conviction to take place. Without the Spirit, true conviction cannot take place.

The old definition of unction included not only illumination and conviction but also assimilation. Assimilation is what Jesus was talking about when He said, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know. We testify of what we have seen. But still you do not receive. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe. How will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven, the Son of Man.” You cannot know heavenly things if heaven has not revealed them to you. Assimilation is taking in the things that heaven has revealed.

I am about to say something that will sound the least mystical of all that I have said so far. When we begin to see that the Spirit is responsible for unction and conviction, which is teaching me and others, a question arises. If that power is so important, so critical, so vital, how do I conjure that up? How do I make unction happen? I do not think there is anything we can do first that is more important than to study the Word. That is part of assimilation. According to 2 Timothy, I am to be a workman who does not need to be ashamed, who correctly handles the Word of truth. When Paul was instructing, he told Timothy to work hard at his calling to study, understand, and assimilate what God has said. Second Timothy 3 says, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of because you know those from whom you learned what the Scriptures say, how from your infancy you have known the holy Scriptures.” All of those things that Paul was saying were a prelude to saying later that the man of God should be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

This is not magic. After having said all about the importance of the Word, I want to take away some of the magic. I do believe at times that the way I was taught the notion of unction was that it is something magical that you hope occurs somehow. When you see Paul the apostle instructing others in the pastoral letters about the importance of the Spirit, the task that he is giving to the ministers of the Gospel is to know the Word so that you faithfully say what it says. Then you are not depending on magic. You are depending on faithful representation of what the Word says. You then believe that God can use more than you can imagine. All Scripture is God-breathed. What does that mean? It means preach the Word. That is the Spirit at work.

The unction is already on the Scriptures. The Bible is already drenched in sacred oil. When I preach, I love certain inexplicable moments. Maybe you have had them. I love it when I find myself soaring, when I almost feel that I am being carried along by the Holy Spirit and I feel like I want it to go on



forever. I cannot stop. The Word is like honey and fire. Yet I have learned from Paul's last admonitions to Timothy as well. He said, "Be prepared in season and out." I have to learn to trust the unction that is always on Scripture, even when my words seem clumsy or common. Sometimes it does not feel like it is working. Sometimes unction is simply received by faith, without feeling either the wind or the heat. We may go home for a Sunday afternoon nap and say, "It went so badly." I can feel deflated. If you are like me, my adrenaline always falls off after I preach. I always go into depression after I preach because I have been so wired for it. If I am depending on what I feel to be an expression of unction, then I must recognize that I am only being hormonally controlled by my adrenaline and not by what the Spirit is doing.

When, with a pure heart, a Christian preacher declares the Scriptures or proclaims Christ or calls for repentance and holiness, his words are still anointed, not because of what he feels but because of the truth of what he says. Martin Lloyd-Jones said, "The right way to look upon the unction of the Spirit is to think of it as that which comes upon the preparation." The preparation that Martin Lloyd-Jones had in mind includes all that I have been saying. It includes the preparation of the message—exegesis, exposition, and homiletics. It includes the preparation of the preacher, through prayer, personal holiness, devotional exercise, study, and general reading. Lloyd-Jones said, "To my mind, this is the sanest and most holistic treatment of the way true spiritual unction is to be found in any twentieth-century treatment of the subject." It is not praying five times and turning east. It is to prepare well, be a man of God, and preach faithfully. You may never see anything change in your lifetime. Yet still the Spirit is at work, because His Word does not return to Him void.

The last parts of unction are aspects of personal piety. We do want the power of the Spirit when we preach. We do want the power of God to come upon us. We know this, however, that the psalmist said, "If I cherish sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Being a man of God is part of the Spirit's working through us. Perfection is not going to come your way. So repentance is part of being an effective preacher. There have been moments in my life, though I do not want to over-mysticize it, in which I have actually felt that my sin had caused power to drain out of me. I have physically felt my ineffectiveness before God because I knew I had unconfessed sin in my heart. I have simply had to say, "Lord, I have to repent before You, or there is no power in me. I am asking You to bless. I am asking You to bring Your Word to these people, but there is sin in my heart that is not confessed." I believe the Lord has said to me, "Then I will take the power from you." To the Jews who have believed in Him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." If you want to be an effective disciple, then you have to hold to His teaching.

Philemon 1 is a powerful statement to me. It says, "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ." That always shocks me a little bit. If I am not active in sharing my faith, then I really do not understand the Scriptures. First, I do not understand their import. They are to be a fountain out of me. Do you not find that, when you are dealing with unbelievers, there is something in you that ignites regarding the necessity of your own understanding of the Word? You begin to see it, feel it, and hear it differently as you share your faith. Hodge said it simply this way, "You must know light to see light." That means that you must walk in God's light to see His Word correctly. Alexander McClaren said, "Power for service is second." That means the power to serve God is always secondary to power for holiness and character. The first, second, and third requisite for our work is personal godliness.

If our piety is so important to our preaching's effectiveness, then our prayers better be effective as well. My piety is insufficient for God to use me effectively. I have to say, "Lord, work beyond me." I pray for it, because I cannot do this. I also say, "Lord, forgive me because my piety has not been what it should

be that You might serve me.” It says in Acts 6, “Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this waiting on tables responsibility over to them and give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.” It is probably a right criticism of a seminary environment that we give so much attention to learning to preach and not much attention to diligent prayer. Whereas when the apostles said why they needed to be relieved from the diaconal duties of waiting on tables, they said there are dual things that must occur for us to effectively minister the Word of God. They were prayer and the preaching of the Word.

If I can leave you with a thought, it is to proclaim the Word. Make sure the people know that is more important than the words you say. Even in the way you are presenting the Word, you should give it honor and respect. Also, do not believe that you are equal to the task of preaching. It is strange. At some point I said, “Be a man of God, and God can make you a great preacher.” Here I am now at the end of the curriculum, saying, “Do not believe you can do this.” You cannot do it apart from the work of the Spirit. With the Spirit, you can be a great preacher. Apart from Him you can do nothing, nothing eternal. Believe therefore that the preaching task begins with prayer and ends with prayer. Before you prepare, before you crack the commentaries, pray. Say, “Lord, lift your hand from the page, or I cannot see what is here. Melt their hearts, or they cannot hear what I say.” Then preach. Then pray, “Lord, overcome my weakness and let settle in their hearts only what You have said.”

Let us pray.

*Father, for these men who are preparing for preaching Your Word, I do bow before You. I even bow before them, because of how much respect I have for these men, who are at this stage of their lives saying that they want to be faithful to You and they want to proclaim Your Word and be true physicians of souls for Your people. Would You give them such regard for Your Word that they would be faithful to it and such regard for Your Spirit that they would bow before You and ask for You to overwhelm them, to flood them with a power that is beyond them, for the doing of Your work. Bless for Christ's sake. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

## **A Redemptive Approach to Preaching**

Let me give a quick rehearsal of where we are in the homiletics curriculum. Long ago, we had the class Preparation and Delivery of Sermons, in which I would lecture on the basics of sermon construction. We said that it was like the anatomy class in medical school, getting all the names for the bones and other body parts. We acknowledged there was some artificiality to that, even as we were learning the basic tools. Then we moved into the class Elementary Practicum, in which we would practice using those tools. We acknowledged that it was still using the basics, but we tried to make it more natural by using the reduced forms. We went from long, boxy statements such as “Because something is true, do something about it.” They always had a principle and application. In the Elementary Practicum class we said to chop those statements in half. The proposition became the anchor clause. The main points were the magnet clauses or developing clauses. We tried to make things much shorter, and we preached from the epistles of the New Testament only, because they often have linear paragraphs that structure their thought. You could break them off into paragraph subsets. It was a good way to start learning how biblical thought develops.

Now we are in Christ-Centered Preaching. Whereas back in Preparation and Delivery of Sermons I said we were going to focus on structure, but we were not going to focus much on the theology of preaching, now that we have the structures in place, we are ready to do the theology. We will have four lessons that deal with the theology that is behind preaching. Ultimately we are heading toward the Advanced Practicum class, in which there will be some more lecturing, but the focus will be on creativity. Once you know where all the paintbrushes are and what the color wheel looks like, you will be ready to discern what is best for your job and your personality or even for the style of passage you are preaching from. There will be focus on creativity and there will be lessons on missional preaching as well. That is preaching cross-culturally, preaching to the postmodern culture, and preaching to the unchurched. We will gain a missional understanding as well. Once we have lectured on those things, we will practice creativity and mission.

We now have some structure in place fairly well. We are ready to introduce some theology and consider how that integrates with what we do in the practice of preaching. Let us pray, and then we will move forward.

*Father, how I praise you for these men who come to give their lives to You. What You have shared with them, the wonderful glories of the grace of Christ, they want to share with others, and they have dedicated their lives, resources, and much time and energy to preparation for such a grand task. Would You bless them in that? Would You enable and equip them by the mercies of Your Spirit, by the wonders of Your grace, and by the power that You alone can provide to fulfill the task to which You have called them? Teach them much of Your grace that they will need in this class and beyond to do this work, for apart from You, they can do nothing. Help them, we pray. May they lean on You and know the fulfillment of doing so. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

An old story, as old as Anselm, tells of a king who stood on his balcony one day and looked out and saw his youngest child out gathering flowers. The king knew the child was preparing a bouquet for the king himself. As the king watched the child go through the fields, however, he noticed that sometimes the child picked the wrong things. A brier was added to the flowers, or something with thorns in it, or a patch of ivy. The king went to his elder son, the younger child's older brother, and said, “Go to my garden. Pick my flowers. And when your youngest sibling comes, take the flowers that he has gathered

and put your flowers in their place.” The elder brother did that. The child came and presented the new bouquet to the king. The king received the flowers with joy and with deep pleasure.

The king, of course, is God. We are the child. The elder brother is Christ. The weeds and briars and thorns are our best works. The flowers from the king’s garden are Christ’s righteousness. It is what He does that makes what we do acceptable and pleasing to God.

That is a very simple notion that can be very difficult to preach. How is it that you tell people to pick flowers for the King, to do what they are supposed to do to please Him? At the same time, how do you tell them to depend on the work of the older brother? How do you compel and motivate? How do you tell and at the same time instruct to lean on another? That is so much of what we are trying to do in Christ-centered preaching. It is reminding people where the best flowers, the only ones that are really acceptable to the King, come from.

The primary goal of this lesson is to see the overarching plan that is the reason we have constructed sermons according to the design we have followed thus far. Let me remind you of some of those design features. We talked early on in *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* about the principle of a fallen condition focus (FCF). Thus far, we have made 2 Timothy 3:16-17 a key to understanding any text’s purpose. If we ask, “What is a text about?” we do not have to guess. The Bible itself tells us in those verses, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” That is from the King James. That word “perfect” is from the Greek word *artios*, and it carries the notion of completeness. All Scripture is given to complete us. We said that if the Bible is saying that it was given to complete us, then there is a necessary implication about us. We are incomplete.

All Scripture is intended to complete us in some way, by leading to salvation or advancing sanctification. The necessary implication is that we are incomplete. We are fallen creatures in a fallen condition, and God’s redemptive work in Scripture is making us whole in ways we cannot by ourselves. For preaching, it means that we begin to look at people and see Swiss cheese. They have holes in them. They are incomplete. What we have to discern in preaching is what we are going to say fills the holes. As I look at somebody who is incomplete, who is not all that God yet intends, what will I say will make him or her complete? I could say, “You work very hard. You do the best you can. Practice these disciplines. Be more holy than the next person.” Ultimately, it will not work if we say that what you do will fill the holes. Something else has to fill the holes.

That kind of understanding pushes us toward a different kind of preaching than what many preachers do. Many preachers approach a text with only two thoughts in mind. I can tell you right doctrine to believe, or I can tell you right acts to do. If that is all I am saying, if the way I am saying to fill the holes is either to accept and know this doctrine or do this right behavior, you must recognize that both of those are merely forms of human legalism. It is saying that either what you know or what you do makes you right with God. Even though what you do may be right, and what you know may be right, you must know that it is not you who make things right with God. You cannot fill the holes.

When we begin looking at the text in this next portion of *Christ-Centered Preaching*, we must consider what that theology means for preaching. If all that is in my brain is “I am supposed to be feeding these people in right doctrine or instructing them in right behavior,” then something will still be missing. There will be hole in our own preaching. We want to discern what that is. Thus all Scripture dealing with this incompleteness, and all expository preaching, which is designed to reflect the meaning of a scriptural passage, addresses aspects of humanity’s fallen condition. Our goal in expounding a text is to

determine not only what it says but also why it was written. We also want to determine what we spiritually share in common with those for or about whom it was written or the one by whom it was written. I am looking at the text and saying, “These people [either the ones by whom or for whom a text was written] have holes in them. How are they like us?”

Thus far we have only discussed the negative. We have only discussed the absence, the wrong, the hole, the fallen condition. Yet if all Scripture focuses on some aspect of our fallen condition, why does it do so? The answer is clear. It does so to supply the warrant and the need for the redemptive elements that Scripture contains to be applied. Just as every Scripture echoes our incompleteness, it is also in some manner signaling the Savior’s work that makes us whole. Our goal in redemptive preaching is to decipher these signals. Until we do so, we do not truly understand our text. It is possible to say all the right words and send all the wrong signals.

If you got up very early and listened to the major radio station in our town and you heard the transition from the late-night programming to the early morning programming, you would hear that every weekday there is something called “the thought for the day.” The thought for the day is given every weekday morning by a man named Richard Evans. Richard Evans says things like, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children. The Bible tells you that you should not exasperate your children. The word “exasperate” is a word that God reserves for His own anger toward His people when they do not do the things they ought to do. You should not give your children cause for exasperation with you, such as being hypocritical by requiring things and then not obeying them yourself. Fathers, do not exasperate your children.” He might say something like, “Employees, when you work today, you should not just work because your boss is good and kind. Even if he or she is not, the Bible says you should work as unto the Lord. It is really Him that you are trying to serve.”

In my mind’s eye, I can envision many Christians, as well as other people, commuting through the streets of our city. The Christians are all doing the same thing as Richard Evans talks. They are all nodding their heads. They are saying, “That is right, Richard. You tell them. Straighten them up. Maybe they will listen today.” Yet there are a couple of problems with Richard Evans. The first problem is he is dead. He died years ago. His words are all recorded. The recording is turned up very high in its reverberation so that it sounds like his voice is coming directly from Sinai. Richard Evans’ other problem is that he is not and never was a Christian. Richard Evans was a leader of the Mormon Church. He was the head of a large cult.

You might say, “But wait. He is saying so many right things. He is giving such wonderful biblical instruction.” The problem is almost never with what Richard Evans says. The problem is with what he does not say. There are certain things he will never get around to saying. If the topic is human performance or good things that good people ought to do, then he is on the money every time. Yet there are certain aspects of grace, the atonement, and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf that will never be mentioned. That is the problem. My concern is that so often in evangelical preaching, when the topic is the behaviors and even some of the doctrines, we are right on the money. Yet when it comes to our dependence on Someone else’s works, not gathering our flowers but depending on the flowers gathered for us by the Elder Brother, that is absent from our messages. The trouble is that we are trying to be true to the text. The text said, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children.” I said, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children.” How could that be wrong? I just said what the text said. To discern why that is wrong, we must move forward.

We need to talk about the nature of redemptive preaching. We are still going to look at the text, yet perhaps in ways some of you may not have considered. If you think about the nature of redemptive

interpretation of Scripture, you might compare it to looking at the Scriptures through two different kinds of lenses. What I am about to say is caricature, and I am going to acknowledge it as caricature. Try to understand my meaning without pushing the image too far. One way of looking at a text is looking at it with a magnifying glass. We get down very close to the text and ask, “What is the tense of that verb? What case is that noun? Is that an objective or subjective genitive? Where was that place? Who was Artaxerxes? We get very close to the text and look at the details. That is a good and necessary thing to do. Historically, that is what we often think that a systematic, exegetical approach to Scripture is. I look very closely at the details. Let me say again, that is a good and necessary thing to do. Yet there is another way of looking at the text. The other way of looking at the text is if you look at it through a fisheye lens. If you look at something through a fisheye lens, you see the horizon. Biblical theology is the process of looking at the text with the fisheye lens so that you are always forced to look out at the horizons. I hope that does not sound too intimidating. What that is saying is that you should always look at the text in its context. Why does every heretic have his verse? It is because he takes it out of context. What biblical theology is doing is asking, “What is the context of this passage?” I need to know that “exasperation” is a term that God reserves for His own anger toward Israel. That is a good thing for me to know. Yet what is the context of that verse? Where does it fit in the larger message?

That discipline of Bible interpretation that emphasizes the overarching themes that unite all of Scripture’s particulars is called biblical theology. Biblical theology is not simply asking what truth this particular passage reveals but rather how it is related to the whole message of Scripture. The primary writer on biblical theology in the last century was Geerhardus Vos. His book, *Biblical Theology*, addresses the forms of interpretation. He identified standard principles of interpretation that are necessary for biblical theology to be done.

The first principle he called the progressive principle. He said, “Biblical theology is that branch of exegetical theology.” Let me pause and point out that his opening statement there was an example of savvy politics. Vos was the first professor of biblical theology at Princeton Seminary. There were New Testament exegetes and Old Testament exegetes already there, and now there was a guy coming for biblical theology. They may have suspected him. “What are you going to do that is different from what we have done for all these years?” So Vos used some savvy by beginning his inaugural lecture, which became the preface to *Biblical Theology*, by reassuring his colleagues that he was only doing exegesis. It was just another form of exegesis. He was still looking at what the text says. He was still examining the meaning of the text. He said, “Biblical theology is that branch of exegetical theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.” God is revealing Himself. That is what He is doing in the Bible. Vos continued, “Revelation is a noun of action, relating to divine activity. Revelation is an historically progressive process, a long series of successive acts.”

There are many big words in that statement, but what he was saying was simple. He was saying that things get clearer over time. God is revealing Himself, and it gets clearer over time. If you were to put it in its simplest terms, you would say that when it comes to understanding God’s revelation, Paul knew more than Samson. It does not mean that what Samson knew was wrong, but Paul knew more. There has been a progression. God has progressively revealed more of Himself through the course of the scriptural revelation.

Vos said that the second principle is the organic principle. He said, “The progressive process is organic. Revelation may be in seed form, which yields later full growth, accounting for diversity.” That means that the seed may seem different than the full fruit. It may seem different, but there is not true difference. He continued, “The earlier aspects of truth are indispensable for understanding the true meanings of the later forms and vice versa.” Another way of saying that is “It is all tied together.” The organic principle

means it is all tied together. In order to understand what comes later, you have to understand what came before. By the way, however, you understand what came before because of what happens later. They explain each other.

Jesus said, “Even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” How do you know what that means? You remember what He was talking about. You remember Moses was leading the people. They were in the desert. They were tired of wandering and tired of manna. Emblematic of the poison that was coming from their lips, vipers came and struck them, and they were dying. Then God told Moses to lift up a serpent, something that was emblematic of their sin, and tell the people to look at it and they will live. If you depend on what God provides, then you will live, even despite the venom that is coming from you. Then Jesus said, “Even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” What did that mean? Jesus was saying, “You must look to Me to live. I am the answer to your poison.” I know what Jesus meant because of what happened in Moses’ time. The brazen serpent explains what Jesus meant. Yet by the way, I understand more of what the brazen serpent was about by the way Jesus used it. The background of Moses explains what Jesus was talking about. Jesus is also explaining what Moses’ background was about. They are explaining each other at the same time.

The final principle for Vos was the redemptive principle. He said, “Revelation is inseparably linked to the activity of redemption.” God is not just showing Himself to be showing Himself. He does not say, “Here is another attribute of my nature. Go memorize it.” The revelation is inseparably related to redemption. What God is revealing about Himself is related to redemptive processes. Vos went on to say, “Revelation is the interpretation of redemption. To see revelation properly, we must see it in its redemptive context. The context and the content of some revelation may be in seed form as it relates to redemption, but it is integrally related to the mature message. It is not properly understood or communicated until this relationship is made clear.” That is an absolutely crucial idea. The revelation is integrally related to redemption. Anything God is saying is related to a redemptive message. The difficult part is figuring out the way it is related to a redemptive message. We must understand, however, that it is not simply there for some future test. It is not to be received merely for information. The revelation says something about what God is doing redemptively.

Vos conceded that the revelation as it relates to redemption may be in seed form. It may not appear to be much about redemption. It may be a small seed message. Yet it is still connected. He was saying that you do not understand the seed until you connect it to its mature form. If I were to explain to you what an acorn is, I could say, “I found it on the ground. It has a pointed end. It has a cap on the other end. The cap is corrugated and rough. The pointed end is smooth. The cap is darker, and the smooth part is lighter in color. Squirrels gather this in the fall, and they eat it in the winter.” That is what an acorn is. I just told you many true things about an acorn, but I neglected to tell you something that you need to know in order to really know what an acorn is about. What did I neglect to mention? I did not mention the oak tree. If you do not know how the acorn is connected to its mature form, I can say many true things about it, and you will still not understand what it is really about.

Imagine another seed in your mind’s eye. This acorn is the commandment, “You shall not steal.” This commandment occurs in the Decalogue. Moses gave it. The commandment, “You shall not steal,” appears again in the New Testament in Colossians and 1 Thessalonians. Stealing is always wrong in the Bible. It is a bad thing. The Bible says not only that you shall not take other peoples’ possessions, but also that you shall not take anything that is not your own. You shall not even take another person’s reputation. If it is not yours, then you have no right to take it. Stealing is bad. Do not do it. Was there anything untrue in what I just said? No, it was all true. Yet somehow Paul said in Galatians that the Law

was our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ. It was our pedagogue, the thing that came along to lead us to Christ.

How does “Do not steal” get us to Jesus? Let us ask a couple of basic questions. If God says, “Do not steal,” then what does that tell me about God? What does it tell me about the nature of God? It tells me that He does not steal. It is beyond God’s ethical character to steal. If it is beyond God’s character to steal, then what else do we know about Him? He protects His people. He protects their possessions, because He loves them. It is beyond His character to hurt His people or to allow His people to steal. Ultimately, therefore, I also learn something else about God’s character. He is holy. I understand that God is holy from the commandment.

What do I understand about me from the commandment? You shall not steal. You shall not take little things. You shall not take big things. You are never to take anything that is not your own, not even somebody else’s reputation. You are not to demean other people. Stealing is bad. Do not do it? So what do I learn about me? I am a thief. We are all thieves. God is holy. I am a thief. There is a problem here. I cannot fix it. The Law is telling me that. You have a problem that you cannot fix, because the God who gave the Law is not going to find your behavior acceptable. You cannot make your behavior acceptable. Somehow, the God who gave the requirement is going to have to meet the requirement for you. The Law was our pedagogue to lead us to Christ.

I did not look at the commandment, asking what the tense of the verb was or how it was written in Hebrew. I still have to do all of that. Yet I have to look at the text in its redemptive context. Why could Paul do that? He said that the message was not done. As God was revealing Himself back there through the Law, He was also leading us to understand something else, namely, what He would have to do through Christ. Therefore if I am interpreting the same passage, those same laws, same character referents, then I have to do the same thing. I have to ask how that is revealing redemptive truth as part of the revelation in its context. Asking basic questions such as “What does this tell me about God?” and “What does this tell me about me?” are ways that can happen.

In the same sense as trying to explain an acorn without mentioning the oak tree, we cannot properly explain any aspect of revelation, even if we say many true things about it, until we have in some way related it to redemption. That was Vos’ point. It is not enough to identify a piece of revelation. It also has to be related to redemption. That is ultimately the revelation’s context. In the biblical record, it has a redemptive context.

What are the implications of such a redemptive perspective? The first is that divine provision is necessary for holy living. Since all Scripture is redemptive revelation addressing our fallen condition, our inadequacy, our incompleteness, then we must recognize that in some way every passage points not only to our need of redemption but also to God’s provision of our redemption. The Bible is not a self-help book. How do I know that? Jesus said in John 15, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” That has tremendous implications for our preaching. If all I have said to people is “You go out and do it. God says, ‘Do not steal,’ so do not steal,” then even if I did not intend to, I have preached a self-help message. I provided no other means of help. I isolated the message to the text without mentioning its redemptive context. Context is what we will continually push for.

The second implication is that biblical theology is necessary for proper interpretation. If I recognize that holiness requires God’s help, then biblical theology must come into play. It is that which keeps pointing me toward God’s provision for what God requires me to do. Calvin said it this way in his sermon on Ephesians 2, “We must gather that to profit much in the holy Scripture we must always resort to our



Lord Jesus Christ and cast our eyes upon Him, without turning from Him at any time. You will see a number of people who labor very hard indeed at reading the Holy Scriptures. They do nothing else but turn over the leaves of it. [Do you see the image? They are turning the leaves, but they do not really know why they are doing it.] They do not have any particular aim. They only wander about. Although they have gathered together a number of sentences of all sorts, yet nothing of value results from them. Even so, it is with them that labor in reading His Holy Scriptures and do not know which is the point they ought to rest on, namely, the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

You believe that all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit. You believe that holy men of God wrote as they were carried along by the Spirit. Jesus tells us in John 14 and 16 what the Holy Spirit’s job is. He said, “The Spirit is to testify of me.” That is the Spirit’s task. As the Spirit is inspiring the Scriptures, what is His task? He is to be revealing the work of God in Christ. That is why revelation is inseparably related to the activity of redemption. These things are working together in that work of the Holy Spirit.

Calvin is typically not thought of as being in the biblical theological movement. He was a precursor to it. Yet Calvin could say the kind of thing that he did in the quote I read. What a wonderful insight he had. He was somehow able to see that the elements in themselves could not function unless they were related to the redemptive message. Later in this course I will assign you to read from Calvin’s *Institutes* Calvin’s understanding of the Law. Remember that Calvin is the one who gives us three uses of the Law. Between Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Calvinists, we always talk about the different uses of the Law. What is sometimes missed, however, and what I will emphasize, is that Calvin does not simply talk about the three uses of the Law, but He ties all the uses of the Law to the revelation of Christ. We rarely talk about that teaching of Calvin. Yet he was doing it even as he talked about the uses of the Law.

Someone else who speaks about this point in a pithy way is Jay Adams. He said, “It is easy to become moralistic when preaching.” He was dealing with that notion of a need for a redemptive understanding of the text. He continued, saying, “While there is nothing wrong with preaching morality, in contrast, moralism is legalistic, ignores the grace of God, and replaces the work of Christ with self-help.” It is that phrase, “ignores the grace of God,” that I want you to have ringing in your ear. If you just tell people what to do and you ignore the grace of God, that is when it becomes moralistic rather than moral. Adams said the problem with this kind of preaching is “the lack of recognition that there is no merit in keeping God’s commands.” Did you know that? There is no merit in keeping God’s commands. When you have done all that you should do, what does Jesus say you are? He says you are an unprofitable servant. Isaiah tells us that our best works are only filthy rags. There is no merit in keeping God’s commands, or else Christ’s death would not have been necessary. Is there blessing in keeping God’s commands? Surely there is blessing. If I am faithful to my spouse, then there is blessing in keeping God’s commands. Yet God does not love me more because I do better than the next person. God loves me because of the work of Christ.

Therefore, Adams said, “If you preach a sermon that would be acceptable to the members of a Jewish synagogue or a Unitarian congregation, there is something radically wrong with it.” Would any Jew be upset if you said, “Do not steal. Be faithful to your spouse.”? Would any Unitarian be upset? Adams says there is something wrong with that message. That something is wrong is revealed by the fact that the Jew and the Unitarian are not upset. He goes on to say, “There is something distinctive in a Christian message. What makes it distinctive is the all-pervading presence of a saving and sanctifying Christ. Jesus Christ must be at the heart of every sermon you preach. This is just as true of edificational preaching as it is of evangelistic preaching.” We know we have to mention Jesus in the evangelistic sermons we preach once per quarter. Yet Adams is saying that in the edificational sermons, in which

you are saying how to pray better or how to be good to your wife or your neighbor, even in those, if Jesus is out of the message, apart from Him you can do nothing. There has to be an understanding of the provision of God as part of the message or it is not even Christian.

The problem with messages that are only instructive is not that they have not quite reached the threshold of a Christian message but that they are some kind of sub-Christian message. They are not merely sub-Christian. They are anti-Christian. Every other faith in the world says that it is what you do that fixes you spiritually with God. Christianity is the one that says you cannot fix it spiritually. That is the uniqueness of Christianity. So if you say to people, “Do better. Do more. Straighten up. Be more disciplined,” all of those messages are not simply sub-Christian, but they are actually pushing people away from the Savior to their own self-effort. That is why they are actually contrary to the message of the Gospel and not just failing to reach their full potential.

This could all be just good theory, but redemptive interpretation is necessitated by biblical instruction. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:2, “I resolved to make nothing known among you but Jesus Christ and what a good guy He was and how you can be really good if you try really hard.” No, Paul did not say that. He actually said, “I resolved to make nothing known among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” That is an amazing statement. We almost want to argue with Paul. We say, “No, that is not true, Paul. You talked about worship practices. You talked about stewardship. You talked about marriage relationships. You talked about many things other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” Apparently in Paul’s mind, however, there was always a cord, a heart, a thread that was moving through all of his messages. You begin to see it in the way the epistles were formed. Before Paul gets to the marriage instructions, he says, “A man should love his wife as Christ loved the church.” There is this thread. You will get the doctrinal instruction, which is that God has loved you with an everlasting love through His Son before he will tell you to love one another. There is always this redemptive context, this cord, this heart, which is why Paul could say to the Corinthians that he was not going to preach anything else except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. There is an atonement message, this provision of God that is always in view as Paul is preaching. He said in the previous chapter, “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.” No Jew is upset by saying, “Do not steal.” No Jew is upset by saying, “Do not take the Lord’s name in vain.” The stumbling block is saying, “You are thieves. You are adulterers. And Christ had to die for you.” That was the disturbing message that made the Gospel message so much a stumbling block.

Jesus Himself said such things, as it is described in Luke 24:27. The scene is after the resurrection. Jesus was walking with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. There we read, “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets he said what was in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” For a biblical theologian, those “all’s” are all important. “Beginning with Moses and all the prophets he said what was in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Since Jesus says that all Scripture is about Him, when we try to explain a text without explaining His redeeming work, then we neglect to expound the very thing Jesus said the text reveals. That is a rather amazing hermeneutical principle. He says it is about Him. So if we are explaining the text and fail to relate it to Him, then we have failed to say the very thing He said it is about. Not to relate the text to Jesus is to fail to say what the text is about.

This is where the title of my book can get you into trouble. When people consider the title of *Christ-Centered Preaching*, what they almost always think initially is that what I am saying and what other people like me are saying who are biblical and theologically oriented is that you have to somehow show how every text mentions Jesus. Is He in that camel track or behind that bush? Where are you getting Jesus? Yet that is not the point at all. The point is not to force the text to mention Jesus. It is to identify where the text stands in relation to Jesus. Where does the text stand in relation to what God will be

accomplishing in His Son? The visual representation of this is Matthew 17, the transfiguration. Remember that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in the cloud. Moses represented the Law. Elijah represented the prophets. They appear with Jesus to say, “This is the culmination. This is the climax. This is what everything has been about.” They came to give testimony of what they represent to Him. It has all been leading up to what He now represents. Jesus told the Pharisees John 5:39-40, “You diligently study the Scriptures, but you do not know on what they concur. They speak of me.” Paul later wrote in Acts 20, as he gave the summation of his own ministry, “The Lord Jesus has given me the task of testifying to the gospel of grace.” That was his task, to testify to the Gospel of grace.

These verses, and others like them, demonstrate that the term “Christ centered” is synecdoche, which means “part for the whole.” The term “Christ centered” is synecdoche for all of God’s redeeming work that makes us know and depend on His grace, ultimately provided in Christ. A Christ-centered sermon does not attempt to make Jesus appear where the text does not speak of Him. It rather demonstrates the relation of the text to either His person or His work or both. Thus these are also referred to as redemptive messages or grace-focused messages. Our goal in Christ-centered preaching is not to make Jesus magically or allegorically appear in every text. It is rather to demonstrate the redemptive principles evident in the text that are most fully revealed in Christ’s person or work and are necessary for our growth in Christ-likeness.

People will get concerned and say, “You cannot mention Jesus in this sermon, because the text does not mention Him.” I will say in response, “You live on this side of the cross. You have been given the biblical theology, the biblical record of everything that has led to this point. If you understand that all of those things were leading to Him, then why can you not mention Him when you preach from one of those passages that you know was intended to lead to Him?” Somehow God is revealing redemptive principles here. We do not say, “Elijah met his enemy at the crossroads. Jesus met our enemy at the crossroads.” That is not what we are talking about. We are talking about God saying, “I provide for a faithless people through my faithfulness.” Ultimately, we will see how that is done in Christ, but right here I am saying that Elijah was ministering in a time when the people had turned away from God. Still God provides His strength in their weakness, His faith in their faithlessness. There are grace principles on display here so that when Christ ultimately completes His mission, we will understand what it is about.

In using the grace principles, I am not looking for wordplay, such as the crossroads relates to the cross. Moses met the daughters of Jethro at a well, and Jesus met a woman at a well. Rahab’s cloth was red, and therefore it symbolizes Jesus’ blood. That is not what we are doing. God delivered His people when they could not deliver themselves. One of those people whom He made His own was a prostitute. When the entire town fell, He rescued her, despite all of her sin. It was grace toward one totally undeserving. I am not making the blood appear in the red cloth. I am saying that here are grace principles on display that will reach their culmination in the ministry of Christ. I understand what He has done by what God has been revealing all along.

We will talk much more in the next lesson about how we discern these things. In this lesson I simply want to say to you that it is necessary to see the redemptive development of Scripture in order to properly interpret it. In the next lesson we will talk about how you do that.

Before we go down the path of forming redemptive messages, we may consider the nature and design of non-redemptive messages. We can learn to recognize what is not going to be faithful to the revelation in all of Scriptures. The nature of non-redemptive messages is that they are inevitably “sola bootstrapsa.” You pick yourself up by your own bootstraps. It is your job, so get going. It can come in various forms.

One form is to pick yourself up by your own bootstraps. Another form is 10 steps to a better something—financial future, relationship with your neighbor, or marriage. Here are 10 things that you can do to fix something. God’s work is just off on the side somewhere. It is all about you. That is the problem. The scriptural message is that it is not all about you.

All these forms of “sola bootstraps” say, “Do this thing or this behavior to get yourself right with God.” The basic problem is that these are not merely sub-Christian messages. They are anti-Christian messages. No Scripture in context—that is the key word, context—says, “Just be good and God will be happy.” We can create a false dichotomy. We can have in our minds the idea that what separates Christianity is that there is legalism on one side of something that is wrong, and there is liberalism on one side that is wrong. Somehow we think that true Christianity is a balance between those two things. I want you to consider, however, what a legalist says will make you right with God. He or she says it is your works. In this society, those works include not going to bad movies or not cursing. What does a liberal say will make you right with God? He or she says it is care for the poor and oppressed and your fellow man. While these sets of behaviors are very different, what I want you to realize is that they are the same things. One says that what you do makes you right with God, and the other says that what you do makes you right with God. They are different sets of rules, but the same theology is in play. I want you to recognize that Christianity cannot be found on that scale. It is something else entirely. It is not what you do that fixes things. It is entirely dependent on what Christ has done. If you believe that, then it will profoundly affect your preaching and what you are willing to say as you preach.

To think about it in basic terms, we can say that the design of non-redemptive messages has the “deadly be’s.” They are messages that can automatically be recognized as non-redemptive. I will tell you that I have preached these messages. I teach this material, and sometimes I walk away from the pulpit and ask, “What did I just do?” It is very easy to give these profoundly simple behavior-oriented messages.

The first form of a “deadly be” is a “be like” message. It is saying, “Follow this example.” Be like Daniel. Dare to be like Daniel. Be like David. Be like Moses. If you really want to make people feel bad, then tell them to just be like Jesus. Think of how these messages go. We look at a portion of David’s life. He fought the lion and the bear. He walked with God. He wrote tremendous poems praising God. He led God’s people. He was a man after God’s own heart. He showed mercy to Mephibosheth. David was a wonderful guy. You should just be like David. Well, ignore that Bathsheba thing. And ignore that Absalom thing. And forget about him numbering the troops at the end of his life. Do you recognize the Bible takes care to tarnish almost every character? I recognize there are a couple of people we do not have much dirt on. Yet virtually everybody is tarnished. The patriarchs were scoundrels. The apostles were cowards. Why do we see such terrible sin in the heroes of the Bible? It is so that we will say, “Is not God great? Is not God’s grace marvelous?” Were it not for God, David’s sin would have toppled a nation. Yet it was God who said, “I will make an eternal kingdom through your life, despite your great undeserving.” Would David have said, “Just be like me?” If David would not say it, then we should not say it.

I wish you could put neon lights around the statement that God is the hero of every text. Gideon is not the hero. Gideon was an idolater. Abraham was not the hero. He gave away his wife repeatedly to other men. His children did the same thing. Yet God preserved and used him, and we are here because God was faithful when Abraham was not. God is the hero of the text. We continually point to God’s work on men’s behalf.

The second form of a non-redemptive message is a “be good” message. These are various forms of “save yourself” messages. Do not drink or smoke or chew or go with the girls who do. That would be

the mark of a legalist of the past generation. Sadly, in our current context, you get certain churches that come from evangelical circles that push nothing but social agendas. It is a message that says discipleship is not about faith in Jesus Christ but rather it is doing what Christ said. It used to be the social gospel of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s that is now being adopted by some evangelicals. What really proves you are a Christian is that you care for the poor more than the next church or welcome unlovely people more than the next church. The mark of discipleship is not faith in Christ but the outperformance of other churches with regard to good discipleship. They are typically things that we respect and like, so we may admire the message. Yet it can be another form of legalism. The message is “If you are really good, even sacrificially good, then you can be okay with God.” We may not recognize that it has been around before. We have heard the message before, and it is not the one of grace. The call to “try harder” in any form is not what God is proclaiming in His Gospel.

The third form of a non-redemptive message, which is maybe the most easy to our lips, is a “be disciplined” message. These are about sanctifying yourself. Pray more. Read your Bible more. Go to church more. Do more and more, and then God will be happy. By the way, how much more will be enough to make God happy? Do you know people like this? They sin and so they read their Bible more to make it up to God. They go to church more. They sing songs louder in church this week. They are making it up to God by doing more than they did before.

Repentance truly shows itself in good works. Yet the good works do not earn God’s favor. They are the fruit of those who have been favored. It is totally counter-intuitive to the way humans normally function to say that we live out of grace, not to gain it. That is sometimes why it is so difficult to preach redemptive messages. It is so counter-intuitive. I want to say, “You straighten up, or God is going to hate you.” Instead I need to say, “God loved you before you ever knew Him. While you were His enemy, He died for you. Therefore live for Him.” It is counter-intuitive.

I need to be careful here. I just said some fairly stark things, and you did not even challenge me. Did Paul ever say, “Follow my example? Or be like me?” He did at least five times. Finish the verse, “Follow my example as I follow Christ.” There is always a redemptive context. There will always be a redemptive context that we have to remember. Yes there are “be like” messages in Scripture, but we always have to identify their context.

Again I have another statement that I wish you could put neon lights around. Recognize that “be messages” are not wrong in themselves. They are wrong messages by themselves. Do you understand? Is it wrong to tell people “Do not steal?” In itself that is not wrong. To tell people, “Be holy as God is holy,” is not wrong in itself. What makes it wrong is when it is by itself. If that is all you say, and if you do not throw them on Christ, on His grace, on His provision, then it is wrong.

Why do people fear grace-oriented messages? The greatest fear among orthodox Christians is antinomianism. They worry that if you focus too much on grace then people will do whatever they want. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commands.” He was not an antinomian. At the same time he said, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” The reason to preach grace is not to avoid the commandments, but rather to enable obedience to them. We are saying that it is by Him, through Him, and for Him that you would do these things. It is a compulsion of grace that is the power of the Christian message. It is not antinomianism. It is not that you cannot tell people to live a certain way, but you cannot tell them that alone. You must tell them that. It would be terrible for a preacher not to tell people to obey God. What wounding we would do to people if we did not take them on a path of holiness. It is to their safekeeping, their good, their glory, blessing, and joy to walk with God. Yet we have to make

sure that they do not think they are earning God's favor by doing that. He was walking with them before they ever chose to be His children and do what He said.

"Be messages" by themselves imply that we are able to change our fallen condition by our own efforts. Such messages, stated or implied, make us no different than Unitarians, Muslims, or Hindus. If all we are saying is to be a good person, then there is no distinctive Christianity in that at all. The demerits of non-redemptive messages include first that there is no merit in keeping God's commands. There is blessing, but no merit. The Westminster Confession, chapter 16, says, "Good works done in obedience to God's commandments are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith, but a Christian's ability to do good works is not at all of themselves but wholly of the Spirit of Christ." That is why we cannot tell people, "Be good and be done." There has to be dependence on the work of God.

Challenges to holiness, without mentions of grace, force a human-centered religion. People cannot do what they are told to do apart from Christ's grace. Requirements of holiness by themselves wound people, because without provision of divine aid they will either despair of hope or trust in their own righteousness. Which is worse? That is a trick question. If you tell someone, "be holy," there are only two alternatives. The person might say, "I will never be holy. I will never measure up." The other alternative is that the person will say, "Okay, I will be holy." Either one is spiritually deadly. Both desperation and arrogance are spiritually deadly. It is wounding to people if we have not mentioned grace.

Thus, if you wound, even unintentionally, you are obligated to heal. We heal by wedding all requirements of holiness to a proper relationship with Him who alone can provide holiness. We show where and how the Scripture we are interpreting does the same. Think about how Paul does it. In Ephesians 6, Paul was at his most strident. He said to put on the full armor of God. Take out the sword of the Spirit. Put on the helmet of salvation. Resist the fiery darts of the devil. He was speaking with all the strength he could muster. Yet before he got to any of that, he said, "Be strong in the power of His might." If all he had said was "try harder," it would have been foreign to the Christian message. So Paul said to fight, but to fight with His might. We want to say to God's people, "Fight. Live for Him. Do it by Him, by His wondrous grace, which is revealed in the context of this text as well."

When you have preached, counseled, or talked to your own child, at some point that person whom God has given you to minister to is going to walk out the door and away from you. I hope that in your mind you think, "I sent him out to do what God requires. With whom does he go? Am I just sending him out by himself? Or am I sending him out with the Savior?" If people do not go with the Savior, then they go with despair. If we send them out with the Savior, however, then they go to joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

We will talk more in the next lesson about how to do that. As you consider this, ask yourself, "If it is not this way, this redemptive way, then what is the alternative?" If you think of it that way, you will know that there cannot be any alternative. Apart from Him we can do nothing. We have to learn how to have the grace of God within the message. When we do it, there is such joy in your preaching that will be your own power to keep doing it.

## **Developing Redemptive Messages**

Last time we talked about the importance of redemptive or Christo-centric preaching, and we said that the goal is not just to have some new science of hermeneutics—how we interpret better than the next guy—but rather, to understand that the essence of Christian preaching is not just to have standards whereby we do better than the next guy, or some basic moral message, but rather to understand the distinction of the Christo-centric nature of all Scripture as the power, as the motivation for the true Christian message. Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” Just a quick review of those importance principles, why is it important to have a Christo-centric prospective. We’ll do a quick review of that and then we’ll move into: “All right, if it’s important, how do we do these messages that are redemptive and true to our expository ethic?” So, a quick review.

First, we talked last time about the necessity of a redemptive focus in all Christian preaching. Expository preaching is committed to revealing what the Word says, and Jesus says the whole Word presents his person and work; that is, by disclosing God’s grace that becomes fully revealed in him. We’re not trying to make Jesus magically appear from every text, every tract and mud puddle, but rather we’re saying, Christ says all the text is in some way disclosing him. It’s not by magical appearance, but rather by disclosing how the whole story is unfolding for the purpose of revealing the redemptive work of God himself, ultimately fully disclosed in Christ.

But of course it’s not just the fact that the story is about Christ, but our ability to do what the Scriptures require is also from Christ’s provision. Jesus said in John 15:5, “Apart from me you can do nothing.” So if our messages are simply moral instructions but we have not found a way of incorporating God’s redeeming activity, his power to do what he requires, then we ultimately fail God’s people by telling them to do what they cannot do apart from Christ. If Christ is necessary, his redeeming work, the grace that is exemplified in him, is necessary for Christian preaching, then we also need to have the identification marks of non-redemptive preaching, so we don’t go there.

And we talked about some of those identification marks in the last lecture as well. Messages that are simply “sola bootstrapsa,” that is, you pick yourself up by your own bootstraps and do better. There is a rather famous appendix in a book that I won’t name particularly, but the appendix is entitled “The Menace of Sunday School,” and the menace that’s being described is this: where the teacher with all good heartedness and apparent good teaching says, “Now Sally, if you’re just a good little girl, Jesus will love you.” It sounds so sweet; but it’s actually deadly to our faith. “If you’re just a good person God will love you.” It’s not on the basis of our goodness that God’s love comes to us but on the basis of his goodness and his provision. And that Sunday school message of “God’s love follows our goodness” is actually deadly to our faith; in fact it’s not a Christian faith at all.

“Sola bootstrapsa” messages are also identified by “the deadly be’s.” We talked about the messages that are simply “be like,” or “be good,” or “be more disciplined.” Again, with the caveat that we’re not saying that these are wrong messages in themselves; but they are wrong messages *by themselves*, if all we have said to people is “be better” or “be more disciplined.”

Now, having another message, not simply giving moralisms, not simply giving the imperatives of Scripture, but reminding people of the necessity of God's grace in their lives, to be and do what he requires, ultimately can become very difficult to preach; not just it's hard to see in the Scriptures, but because it's a notion that wars against the human reflex that says, "I will fix my own situation, I'll do what God requires and then God will reward me for it."

In a famous sermon by Martin Luther, he gives his own summary of why this is so difficult, in a message entitled "The Son: A Conclusion of the Christian Life." Here's what he said: "It is exceedingly difficult to get into another habit of thinking in which we clearly separate faith and works of love. Even though we are in faith, the heart is always ready to boast of itself before God and say, 'After all, I've preached so long and so well and done so much, surely he will take this into account.' But it cannot be done; with men you may boast, but when you come before God, leave all that boasting at home, and remember to appeal from justice to grace. Don't ask God to be just, don't ask him to be fair, you don't want God to be fair. What do you want? You want God to be merciful, you want his grace."

"But let anyone try this," says Luther, "and he will see and experience how exceedingly hard and bitter it is for a man who all his life has been mired in his works-righteousness to pull himself out of it and with all his heart rise up through faith in the one mediator. I myself have been preaching and cultivating grace for almost 20 years and still I feel [this is how you know it's Luther; listen to these words], I feel the old clinging dirt of wanting to deal so with God that I may contribute something so that he will have to give me his grace in exchange for my holiness. Still I cannot get it into my head that I should surrender myself completely to sheer grace. Yet I know that this is what I should and must do."

It is so hard, I mean it really is, particularly when you've been out of backgrounds of performance or whether you're just trying to say, "But surely God will be pleased if I do X." And the answer is he will be pleased, but it's not the reason he loves you, it's not the reason he forgives you, and it's not why his mercy comes. And just to kind of put all that together is so difficult: to separate pleasing God from acceptance before him. And think of how those things function.

So we go down correct paths today, I want to talk about some distinctives of Christ-centered preaching. We talked about non-redemptive preaching last time. What are some distinctives of Christ-centered preaching? First, again, what it's not. Christ-centered preaching is not allegorical preaching. We are not talking about that; it is not allegorical preaching. Christ-centered preaching does not attempt to make the person of Christ appear in every Old Testament mud puddle and camel track by allegory or analogy through paralleling Old Testament accounts with New Testament experiences of Jesus: what Sidney Greidanus calls "Leapfrogging to Golgotha." It's so easy to do this, right? Rahab warned the spies and told them where she was and the cloth she put outside of her home which was to be her rescue, what was the color of the cloth? It was scarlet, which of course indicates what? The blood of Christ. And you kind of, well, maybe it means she was a scarlet woman. Maybe it doesn't indicate shed blood, maybe it indicates present sin. Could it mean either? The idea is we're not trying to impose our imagination on what the text says. We're trying to say what the text says and that's part of Christ-Centered preaching, not allegorical preaching.



B. It's also not antinomian preaching, OK? It's also not antinomian preaching. Tell me, you all know this, standard objection: If you begin to say that there's grace in all the Scriptures, and grace should be the motivation of our preaching, and grace should work its way into our sermons. Now what are people concerned about? Too much grace, which is going to lead to what? It'll lead to license. And you have to say, "Is that true?" It certainly can be. I almost feel like there is a time in everybody's life if they come to an understanding they are made right before God and kept right before God by his grace alone that the pendulum swings. You know, you kind of go, "Oh, you mean he'll still love me if I do X?" that people kind of slide over into X. And then they say, "Oh, oh, he warned me about X because he loved me." And the pendulum starts swinging back, but it seems like that almost everybody kind of makes that shift. And we say, "Is it a danger?" Of course. But you have to say, those in whom the Spirit dwells—and that's a caveat—those in whom the Spirit dwells, grace is the vitamin of holiness. It is the grace of God that teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. Remember how Paul writes Titus—grace rightly perceived is the motivation and the enablement of Christian obedience. Without grace you cannot do anything. And so rightly perceived grace is not antinomianism; it actually is the power of holiness.

Christ-centered preaching does not negate the necessity of law in believers' lives but teaches that our obedience has no power to redeem or grant merit before God. That's usually a shock to people. "My obedience does not give me merit?" Your best work is only what before God? Filthy rags. Our obedience does not gain us merit before God. Christ-centered preaching reveals the grace in all of Scripture to motivate people according to Christ's precept, "If you love me you will obey what I command." It's a very different concept of how grace is used. If what we're doing is instilling greater and greater love for Christ, then we will love what he loves. That's why Jesus said, "If you love me." It's why love is the greater compulsion and ultimately the greater power of the Christian life. By the way, for those of you very sharp, that reference there is totally wrong. It's not John 12:14, it's John 14:15.

C.S. Lewis phrased it this way, just kind of a wonderful summary of these thoughts: "All the initiative has been on God's side, all has been free unbounded grace, and all will continue to be free unbounded grace. Bliss is not for sale, cannot be earned. Works have no merit, though of course faith inevitably, even unconsciously, flows out into works of love at once. The Christian is not saved because he does works of love; he does works of love because he is saved. It is faith alone that has saved him, faith bestowed by sheer gift. From this buoyant humility, this farewell to the self with all its good resolutions, anxiety, scruples, and motive-scratchings, all the protestant doctrines originally sprang." That's a wonderful statement: that ultimately it's the putting aside of self in justification but also in sanctification that he says was the driving force of the protestant ethic and doctrine.

That means it's very important and we have to think about what redemptive preaching is. It is this: it is recognition of all Scripture as a unified revelation of God's redeeming work. Hear that? All of Scripture is a unified revelation of God's redeeming work. Sidney Greidanus, in his book *Sola Scriptura*, puts it this way: "In opposing the fragmentary interpretation which reads the Bible as a collection of biographies, the redemptive-historical side [and that's really what we're talking about, redemptive-historical preaching] stresses the hermeneutical significance of the

unity of redemptive history. The unity of redemptive history implies the Christo-centric nature of every historical text. Redemptive history is the history of Christ. He stands at its center, but no less at its beginning and end. Scripture discloses its historiography, that is, the theme of its history, right at the beginning. Genesis 3:15 places all subsequent events in the tremendous battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, between Christ coming into the world and Satan, the ruler of this world. And it places all events in the light of the complete victory which the seed of the woman shall attain. In view of this, it is imperative that not one single person be isolated from this history and set apart from this great battle. The place of both opponents and coworkers can only be determined Christologically.”

Now, they are just wonderful words but there is a lot there, so let me just say: what it’s saying? It’s saying everything is connected to the great battle whose theme was announced right at the beginning of the Bible. What’s the Bible’s theme? It’s not John 3:16. Go to Genesis 3:15. Remember God’s speaking to Satan after the fall: “I’ll put enmity (hatred) between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed.” What’s going to happen? “You will strike his heel, he will crush your head.” And now the battle is engaged. Everything from that point forward is about the great battle—every person, every event, every chapter is another part of that unfolding battle as God is redeeming, reclaiming the world and Satan is trying to stop him. It’s all part of the battle.

Our goal—let’s just look at the brackets beneath that paragraph—our goal is not to make every passage mention Christ, but to show where every passage stands in relation to the grace ultimately revealed in Christ. If Genesis 3:15 is your interpretive high hill over which to look at the rest of history, it’s almost as though—some of you have done this—that you’re standing on a hill overlooking a Napoleonic battlefield. Can you kind of picture it? You’re on this high hill and you’re trying to explain everything that’s in front of you, this grand battle that’s going on. And you say, all right, here’s the infantry up close, and there is the cavalry back behind that hill, the artillery on the hill, there’s a supply train further back, there are spies on both sides, and your trying to explain any person, any feature without relating it to the battle is not to understand what it’s really about. So in this great battle whose commencement has already been announced—and by the way whose end is known—in this great battle everything has a place and the goal in Christo-centric preaching is to say, “Where does it fit? What’s happening here? What’s the role of this spy? Or that horseshoe? Or that warrior? Where does it fit in what’s going on here?” Which is not to impose something on the text that isn’t there, but rather to find the place of the text in the great battle.

Now there are wrong ways to do it, and I just put here what’s on your sheets. It’s not this: what Greidanus called this “Leapfrogging to Golgotha,” where the preacher in essence says, “This passage reminds me of something in Jesus’ life.” All right? Rahab’s cloth was red and that reminds me Jesus’ blood was red. Moses met the daughters of Jethro at a well and Jesus met a woman at a well. You know. And so somehow, this leapfrog that reminds me of something in Jesus life, is not what we’re talking about. Rather, what we’re talking about is this: Christ-centered exposition where we are saying everything from Adam and Eve to the consummation is part of this great battle of the King ultimately crushing the serpent. And there have been chapters along that history. And our goal is to say where are we in the redemptive battle? Where are we? Where does it fit? So I’m not imposing something that is not there; I’m finding the place of the

story in the overarching plan of God's purposes. The preacher explains the role that says of any epoch, event, person, and passage within the divine crusade of redemption that is the sovereign victory of the seed of the woman over Satan. You think of that, what's really happening, there's a divine crusade that's going on through Scripture. God is ultimately conquering. He's bringing all things to bear. Now sometimes there are defeats, sometimes there are false hopes, there are false messiahs, there are idols, there are lots of things that will be put aside, destroyed as God is making progress in the battle. And our goal again is to find out where we are in that great battle.

The quote at the bottom of the page I think is a really neat one. "Christian preaching is simply the proclamation of the divine crusade of redemption of God's way out of the human predicament." That's Simon Blocker and that was done in the '50s, but you think, "Wow, that's really perceptive." Here's the fallen condition, right, in which we live; the human dilemma. And all truly Christian preaching is saying, "What's God's way out of there?" That's really why we started with the FCF, because it is real fallenness, right? You require a divine solution. What's the problem in this text? What's it addressing? How is God bringing his answer to bear rather than just what do we just do to fix it?

1. If you thought on page 3 of a basic process for Christ-centered preaching, the three-step process, in some ways you already know this; this is kind of old hat to you because you are kind of ready instinctively for these steps, from what we've done in the past. The first step in this three-step process for Christ-centered preaching—that is preaching Christ, or again, think semantically, that is par for the course—of God's redeeming work, from each text; the first step: What is the FCF? What does the text say? What's the Fallen Condition Focus? That is the burden of the text that requires God's intervention and rescue. You're going to read an article a little bit later by Tim Keller in which he talks about one of the nice things about redemptive or Christ-centered preaching in a post-modern era where everybody loves narratives so much. He says there's always an implicit story and the implicit story is always that Christ is coming to the rescue. All preaching that is truly Christian has that implicit narrative that somehow God's got to get you out of this. A true FCF requires a divine solution and thus exposes the inadequacies of legalistic, moralistic messages—that is "the deadly be's" by themselves.

2. Having identified the FCF we ask, "What redemptive or grace principles are evident in the text? OK, there is the dilemma—what are the redemptive or grace principles that are also here? We examine historical context, genre, narrative features, doctrinal statements, divine actions, surrounding passages, whatever it is that underscores the necessity and the presence of God's redemptive work on behalf of his people. We're looking for how grace is getting on the scene to get out of the fallen condition and then . . .

3. In light of how these principles fit into the overall plan of redemption, how should we respond to these principles in our lives? Long ago, you heard me say that what we're trying to do in preaching is take truth to struggle and that becomes a little bit more evident now; that if we're starting with FCF, with the Fallen Condition Focus, we're ultimately saying what truth is dealing with that, but inevitably there would have to be grace principles involved. The truth is never going to be, "You fix it." Somehow there has to be grace on the table to deal with the Fallen Condition Focus. Now often questions start to come: now does grace go with the first point, the second point, or the third point? And the answer has to be, there are all kinds of *Christ-*

different strategies, right? The real point is that by the end of the sermon we have to know that it's God's supply, right? And sometimes we'll say, now recognize that's because God has delivered his people that they were to obey him, and because God has delivered, maybe I'll lay the foundation early.

We're going to listen to Clowney two meetings from now in which he will kind of take people through an entire message of performance doing, and then get way down here and say, "By the way, you can't do that." And he'll kind of turn the tables by the end and talk about the necessity of Christ. I don't think there is a perfect place. I think you just have to have the understanding that if you left people with themselves, there isn't much hope there. So there are different strategies for where it will fit. I think that most of the time you'll find that you'll start integrating and then it builds as you go. But you'll see different strategies evolve as you start preaching this way.

Now I've said that what you want to do is find the redemptive or the grace principles in the text, but that kind of delays the question, which is: "All right, how do I find those principles?" So let's start to go there with Roman numeral III on page 3.

III. How do you find the redemptive principles in the text? Well, there are some traditional approaches that are useful for some texts.

1. And the first is simply a direct approach; that is, you expound the text's direct mention of Christ or his Messianic work. All right, let's just presume that you're in Matthew 26, the crucifixion scene. Is there any redemptive truth there? Just say what's there. Just tell us what's there. There's direct reference where there has been direct explanation, where there has been direct reference to some aspect of God's redeeming work. So a Gospel account, a Messianic psalm, an epistolary reference to the work of Christ on our behalf: he himself died in his body on the tree that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. I mean, just expound that and you'll get redemptive truth where there is direct mention.

2. A second approach, which you'll read a little bit of Clowney on, and which will scare you to death, so we're not going to do a lot of it this year, is the typological approach, OK, where you look for types. And that certainly is a legitimate way. And we recognize the New Testament identifies types. Kind of the standard Reformed understanding of types is that we do not say something is a type unless the Bible says that's a type. All right? Otherwise, many things can be modified different ways.

Now you don't recognize, I just stepped around all kinds of landmines. We don't identify as a type unless the Bible says it's a type. What's the question, "How does the Bible say that?" Right? And there are the clear ones at times. You get David and you get the water from the rock; those are clearly identified as types. The big question for a lot of theologians these days is, "What about those types that are not said to be types but are literary parallels?" I can remember once hearing a pastor in my youth. I may have been early in seminary at that time, I don't know. But I can remember almost just laughing out loud as he talked about Isaac being a type of Christ. He said, you know, wood goes on his back, and he goes up a hill, and his father is going to kill him. He was very serious. I'm kind of "Ha, ha," you know. How silly. Well, I don't think it's so

silly any more. I mean the parallels are so striking, and I think, all right, now the Bible does not say that this is a type. But if we were reading *Moby Dick* and we saw Queequeg pick up a spear of a certain shape in chapter 2 and in chapter 42 that same spear reappeared and Queequeg held it the same way, we'd say, same author? Oh, there is a connection here. And then we say, what if it's different authors? That's Moses and this is Paul. Well, it's God. It's the Holy Spirit. Was there something intended? And I'm not going to solve that before you today. I will just tell you that study of typology, if you want to do your PhD, is a real hot place to go these days, OK, and I think very fruitful. As a lot of Old Testament narrative studies are unfolding and we're seeing how Hebrew narratives work, there's something there. But right now, I'm saying you don't have to go there, OK? Obviously some texts will work typologically, some texts work by direct mention of Christ because he's mentioned right there. I'm more concerned in these lectures to talk about, if you will, the more common occurrences of how you interpret texts that are the usual texts in Scripture. So I want to talk about item B.

B. If not direct or typological approaches, what's the most common redemptive-historical approach useful for all texts? That is, identifying where this passage's events, persons, or instructions fit in the overall context of God's redemptive plan, in order to proclaim the redemptive or grace principles that will provide motivation and enabling for the passage's imperatives. Now that last little phrase, "motivation and enabling for God's imperatives," that's all of the next lecture; that's what we're doing next time. For right now we're just saying, "All right, where do you get Christo-centricity in other texts?" In context, every passage either is: a) predictive of the work of Christ; b) preparatory for the work of Christ; c) reflective of the work of Christ; or d) resultant of the work of Christ. Now I'll go back through them.

Certain passages are going to be predictive of the work of Christ. Give me examples: What are passages or types of literature in the Bible that are predictive of the work of Christ? The prophecies, messianic psalms, OK. Obviously, if you're going to preach from Isaiah 40, "Comfort my people," and you are going to give no mention of Christ, you didn't get it. You didn't understand what was going on there. So there are passages that are predictive of the work of Christ.

Other passages are preparatory for the work of Christ; in other words they are preparing us for the person and/or work. Now that's an important slash—they are preparing us to understand Christ's person and/or work. The sacrificial system, why is it there in the Old Testament? Because God's people will be made right with God through sacrifices, right? No, not entirely. Something else is going on. We are being prepared to understand what God would do through the perfect lamb, through his son—the sacrificial system. What about the Law? The Law was preparing us in a different way. How was it our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, our pedagogue, our come-along counselor; how was it preparing us to do that? By teaching us what we could not do. It's why we have in the Sermon on the Mount not only the past iteration of the law, but the highest iteration of the law. As Jesus—you know we say it so sweetly at times—he just said, you know, "Consider the birds and the lilies." Isn't that a wonderful, comforting message? Wait a second. He just said anybody who calls his brother a fool is in danger of hell fire. If you look at a woman to lust after her you've already committed adultery in your heart. If you are a Pharisee, what are you doing now? "Whoa—I thought I was OK. He can't be right." No, it's the thing that's to humble you is the law, and when you understand it fully and state it accurately it drives

everyone to their knees. It's supposed to. There are passages that are preparing us for the work of Christ.

Item C, which we'll talk about the most in a little bit, I think is the most critical category. There are passages that are reflective of the work of Christ; that is, they are reflecting grace principles. There are passages that are reflecting grace principles in words, actions, or relationships. Grace principles are being reflected in words, in actions, or relationships. So there is something that I am going to understand more fully about the life and ministry of Christ and it's because of this ancient example that I'm beginning to understand more about what Christ would do. God delivered his people though they have rebelled against him. He forgave them though they have done it over and over again. He rescued the weak, he fed the hungry. In each case God is taking care of people who can't take care of themselves. There's some sort of relationship by which God is explaining his character that's going to come to full understanding in the ministry of Christ. There are things that are being reflected of grace in words, in actions, or relationships. Doesn't have to mention Jesus—it's preparing God's people to understand what he would do by the reflection of those grace principles.

Finally, certain matters are resultant of the work of Christ. If you can pray now before God, the High Judge of the universe, you can nonetheless approach boldly the throne of grace. How can that happen? It's a result of the fact that someone has already preceded you. Christ has already done a work and as a result of that work that is why you can pray. In each case what's being said is that Christ has done something which we're either being prepared to understand or which we now understand more fully and are responding to.

The next page tries to, if you will, drill down even further into how passages may be Christocentric, redemptive revealing, by saying that there may be macro as well as micro interpretive options. The macro option is the first one: redemptive-historical. That is identifying the place or the function of the text in redemptive history. Now the little graphic I put on the overhead just a little bit ago, that's redemptive history. It's everything from Adam to the consummation and saying, "All right, where do we fit in that redemptive scheme?" So: looking at the big redemptive history and saying, "Where does this passage fit?" And most people are pretty intimidated by trying to do that. I am, aren't you? Oh, oh, have I got it right? Have I figured out is this the right interpretation to that particular event? So here are some hints.

Recognize that some aspects of redemptive history are bridges, that they are bridging our understanding of what Christ would accomplish. There may be events or patterns or persons that advance our understanding of God's redemptive message or means. Take Melchizedek, just there. What do you remember about Melchizedek? King of Salem, which is what? King of peace. Where did he come from? We don't know. When did he die? We don't know. But what was his purpose? Why did he come? OK, he's the high priest to whom? To the father of nations. He's somehow bringing peace to the one by whom all nations will be blessed. God is helping us to understand something. It's a bridge to understanding that Christ will ultimately accomplish and what his ultimate rule will be and his purposes for whom? So there's a bridge to our understanding. Obviously if I said something about the temple ceremonial system, right? It's bridging our understanding.

But even as there can be bridges in redemptive history there can be dead ends too. At times recognize there are events, patterns, and persons that demonstrate a false hope of redemption. It could be the law, or the judges, or the kings. We're so Western in our thinking of how the Bible ought to function, you know, it will be just this to this to this—it will be a linear function of things. But it's not always that way. There can be false hopes and dead ends. Think of it. All right, we'll give the law and everyone will perfectly obey the law and everything will be OK, right? No, that doesn't work. OK, ya'll just go do it and everyone just do what they think is right in their own eyes. Period of the judges. Well, that doesn't work very well. Listen, here's what we'll do. We'll get the biggest, brightest, smartest, best-looking guy we can get and we'll make him the king and he'll make all the right judges and that'll fix it. Right? Well, look here. You know what, we may need another judge, we may need a better lawgiver and keeper, maybe a better king, not this, not this, not this, but this. Sometime if you just remember it's Hebrew, it's oriental thought, it's not just linear this to this to this. Sometimes there's this circle navigation where the point being made is circled by all the events that surround it. And God through the course of history is saying, "That doesn't work and that doesn't work and that doesn't work. You'll need another priest, you'll need another prophet, you'll need another king. And there he is." There are dead ends as well as bridges and we begin to see how they function in the course of biblical history.

Now, my trying to comfort you a little bit may have done none at all. 'Cause I recognize, OK, oh boy, I hope I can do that. So what are maybe narrower ways to look at a text and still think redemptively? One way is to look at the text and consider it in terms of doctrinal instruction. Is there some doctrinal instruction there that is telling me redemptive truth? That is, we're trying to expound redemptive doctrine, some understanding of grace that is exemplified, stated, or taught in the immediate text. This is a micro approach, OK, not trying to go out this way, but right there. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him, credited to him as righteousness. Any grace principles in there that you can think of? Just say what it says, you know? There may be doctrinal instruction that's right there, and so if you say, "He was the worst of all the kings and God forgave him when he repented." Is there a grace principle there? I want to keep us from thinking that Christo-centric preaching is always macro-level preaching. Sometimes you can come in close just by looking at the doctrinal instruction that may be right here.

Another form of that is looking for literary motifs. Now this is why you pay the big money to come to this class. I've never said this in this section of Christ-centered preaching before. This is new stuff. It's not even in the book! I just sometimes look back at my own preaching and say, "Now wait a second, that's what I'm saying, but what am I doing? What am I doing at times that doesn't fit?" And I recognize at times when I'm preaching about a Christo-centric theme, there may be some sort of literary motif that I'm working off of. OK? Now, you know what a motif is? It's a repeated theme, image, or phrase. So sometimes I think the way in which redemptive truth is coming is explaining how the author uses a literary motif to prefigure or echo an aspect of Christ's redeeming work. Now this can be macro as well as micro.

Paul looks at Moses striking the rock and the water coming out of it and he says that rock was Christ. He says that rock was Christ. God bringing water out of a rock, God blessing people in a desert, God providing for his people where they cannot provide for themselves. He said that's what Christ is. All right, if you were to go throughout the Old Testament, you'll find one of the

most common repeated motifs of wording, not of image, but of wording is, “slow to anger and abounding in love.” Over and over again. When God is wanting to capture his character, how he deals with people despite their failings, he will say, “I’m slow to anger and abounding in love.” It’s a repeated theme that goes over and over again as God is making his point.

Let me just do one or two more. I was in Israel this summer. It just struck me so much again. When Joshua goes into the Promised Land, he ultimately has a conquest, he conquers the territory. Do you remember? From Dan to Beersheba. He goes from Dan to Judah. When David takes over as king, his first conquest is as he ultimately establishes the kingdom from Dan to Judah. Jesus through most of his ministry stays in a little 17-mile radius circle around Jerusalem, goes up to Capernaum, but he’s staying in a fairly small area. Then right before the crucifixion he goes up to Dan and comes down to Judah. What’s happening? He’s taking the land again. Where does he perform his first miracle? Shechem. Why a healing, raising somebody from the dead? Who did that before? Elijah. Who came to Shechem when he first entered the Promised Land and set up camp at Shechem? Who’s the first one who did that? Abraham. Every time God comes to take the territory he goes to Shechem. What’s the territory ultimately? Dan to Judah. Now, I’m not saying you have to buy this. The people of Israel did. When Jesus did the raising, what did the people say? He must be Elijah. They recognized the connection. And it sometimes helps us with passages we struggle with.

Remember Matthew says after Jesus had been taken to Egypt because of the persecution with his mother and father, what passage of Scripture was quoted? Do you remember? “Out of Egypt have I called my sons.” Well, that wasn’t talking about Jesus, if you go back to the passage; it’s talking about the nation of Israel. But what they recognized was that whenever God is redeeming his people, the great stories of the Exodus in the Bible, that great redemptive motif has people coming out of Israel. And what did God call Israel in Exodus 5? “My son.” You hear the motifs?

Now, I think you’ll get comfortable in those over time. I’m not asking you to do that yet. It’s really the next one that I think is the most helpful to you and the most common, as you have to get gunned up full. What are the different cartridges you can use for these different passages? Here’s the one that I think is the most helpful most of the time: what I call relational interaction, that is, identifying redemptive truths, grace principles, expressed in God’s interaction with people or his representatives’ interactions with people; that is, you’re looking real micro and you’re saying, “In this passage, I don’t have to go way out to the horizons. I don’t even have to look into motifs as it were. How am I seeing grace exemplified right here? How is God providing strength in weakness? Faithfulness despite unfaithfulness? Provision for need, forgiveness of sin, discipline or correction?” I think this is kind of the most frequently used and often the most powerful interpretive tool. Because what we’re really saying is, “How is God displaying himself as the hero?” Does that help a little bit? You’re just looking and you’re saying, “All right, forget all that stuff about motifs and macro redemptive stuff; how is God displaying himself as hero here?”

Remember what ultimately Christo-centric preaching is? The divine solution to the human dilemma. How is God demonstrating himself to be the hero? It may be through whom he supplies—some representative of his. As David cared for Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth? Remember him? Whose son is he? Jonathan’s. Therefore he’s the grandson of whom? Aaah, the



grandson of Saul. Who's on the throne now? David. Who's his greatest threat? Any heir of Saul. But Mephibosheth can't take care of himself. Why can't he take care of himself? Because he's lame in what? Both feet, remember? He can't take care of himself and he's David's greatest threat. But what does David do with him? He sits him at his table. Honors him. What do we learn? We learn something about the nature of God even toward his enemies, like you and me. The ones who damaged him and then alas are blessed by him. God is the hero, how is he showing us that?

If you will, I always recognize at this point that if you kind of lay out all of the redemptive options, that people are kind of appreciative in the moment but later on you'll be at your desk somewhere, you know, it's going to be about midnight, and you're going to be going, "Oh no, which of those do I pick? Which is the right one on this text?" And I'd like to make it more simple. The simplest for me and what I honestly do most of the time when I get stuck, I take out a different pair of glasses. And this set of glasses has two lenses that I can identify by two questions. You ready? Here they are.

The first question is this: What does this text reveal about God's nature or attributes which provide the work of Christ? And/or two: What does this text reveal about our nature or attributes which require the work of Christ?

All right. It's just this simple. What does this text tell me about God and what does this text tell me about me? Now, those are not unfair questions, OK? You can ask those questions of any text and it's not what everybody fears; I'm going to be required to import the New Testament on the Old, I'm going to do eisegesis, I'm being forced in Christ-centered preaching to do this kind of non-biblical preaching. I'm saying, no, no. Just ask two questions. What does this text tell you about God and what does this text tell you about you? Because if you're doing that you're forced to think redemptively. You are not the answer to whatever is the burden of the text. God is the answer and somehow God is revealing your need as well as his provision. It may not be full-formed, remember; it may just be a seed, it may just be hints of what's going to happen. But ultimately God is revealing something about you and something about himself, and asking those questions, which are very fair questions—what did I learn about God and what did I learn about me here?—is going to force us to think redemptively.

Now at times I fear that guys will be thinking, you know, "I just don't want to impose the New Testament on the Old. The Old Testament should be able to be interpreted with itself." I do agree with that, but at the same time I want to remind you, you live this side of the cross, and it was never God's intention to say, "Now when you interpret the Old Testament you turn a blind eye to what you know about Jesus. Don't you dare think about anything on the cross. Don't you think about that at all. You've got to interpret the Old Testament on it's own basis." That was never his intention. It is not what the Gospel writers would do. They all knew where they were in history and they recognized that to understand their place and what had led them to that place they had to understand that prior history in terms of where they stood in today's history. So, yes, if I say, "What do I learn about me?" I recognize I'm a New Testament Christian. But that was written for me. Everything that was written before my time was written so that through the instruction of Scripture we by patience and the encouragement of the Scriptures might have hope. It was written for me, and I knowing my place in time say, "All right, I know what Jesus had to do and

I'm understanding more of that because of what led to it, and I will look at redemptive history, yes, in terms of what it was intended to reveal. But that means I can ask the question: what does that tell me about God and what does it tell me about me?" And that's fair, that's OK to ask about any text.

The bottom of page 4 says this: "Revealing aspects of the necessity and provision of grace rather than mention of Jesus (or some account from his incarnation) is what makes a sermon redemptive. The term Christ-centered is synecdoche for all of God's redeeming work that makes us know and depend upon his grace ultimately provided in Christ. A Christ-centered sermon does not attempt to make Jesus appear where the text does not speak of him, but rather demonstrates the relation of the text to his person and/or work. Often biblical texts are not directly revealing the person of Jesus but are revealing a dimension of God's gracious nature that will be most fully revealed in Christ and must be grasped by us to know him and to reflect him." OK, so we're not taking out our magic wand to make Jesus appear. We're saying, "What grace principles are evident here that become most fully revealed in Christ's person and/or work?"

Let's talk about some specifics because we'll be using different forms of literature even this semester. How do we use these redemptive lenses to preach the whole Bible as Christian literature? Which by the way is the name of the Goldsworthy book, right, which you're going to be reading, which intends to look at different genres of Scripture and saying, how are they Christo-centric? But here are just some hints as you go along.

If we're in histories or biographies, put those in the same category, how do we speak Christo-centrally? Well first, explain the place of events or persons in the redemptive plan. They may be predictive, preparatory, reflective, resultant, and/or you might expose the grace principles evident in doctrinal statements, literary motifs, or relational interactions, that is, of God or his representatives with his people. But here is the essence: make sure God is the hero. Even when exemplars teach character. That is, David, or Abraham. There are aspects of right character that the exemplars are meant to show us, but even they are blessed because of God's goodness ultimately, not theirs. God is still the hero. Note how God as hero may change the wording of main points. Not, for instance, "Be strong and courageous so that God will help you." Who's the hero here? It all depends on you being strong enough and courageous enough. Rather, it might be something like this: "Because God is your help, be strong and courageous." Because God is, you can live as a result of that. God is the hero.

How do law passages function? Show how the law leads to dependence on grace. Two, show how the imperatives are always based on the indicatives. Again, that may change wording. Not, for instance, "Obey God so that God will treasure you." Rather, "Because God treasures you, obey him." We do it over and over again, but let's just remind ourselves, what's the introduction to the Decalogue say? "I am the God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; therefore keep my commands." What he did not say was: "Keep my commands and then I'll bring you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." There are imperatives. But they are based on the indicatives. There is an order in the law by the lawgiver.

And this is just kind of fun because I've used this example in the past years and now the man is in the room. Jimmy Agan years ago had this course and he spoke to our faculty a couple of years

ago and he said candidly, “Well I kind of questioned it when Dr. Chappell said this.” And he said, “Then, as I was getting my PhD in the New Testament I recognize it was always the case. There was no exception that I could find in the Bible where an imperative did not have an indicative in the context, where the imperative was always based on the indicative. And it wasn’t looking far, it was always in context. Once I learned to look for it, it was always there.” Am I lying, Jimmy? He’s shaking his head. What are you going to say? It’s the president asking you.

But I mean, it was just this wonderful thing for me to say it’s not just created theory. I can think of when I taught my daughter to find geodes when we were living over in Illinois once upon a time, and you know, all over the ground were geoded rocks, but she wasn’t accustomed to seeing them, but I just found a few for her and I said, “Look, it looks like that.” And once her eyes got accustomed to seeing them, she could see them all. But she had to train her eyes a little bit, of course. But once her eyes got tuned she could see them. And I think once you begin to say, “You know what? There are never imperatives in the Bible without indicatives of God saying the reason you’re doing this is because of who you are by my gracious action.” The imperatives just don’t exist apart from that. And once you begin to see that, then you see it everywhere. And it really kind of opens the Scriptures for you. It’s not this imposition, it’s not some kind of fabricated method. It just becomes what is there, and what I’m doing in Scripture is not saying the same thing over and over again—Jesus loves you, so obey him. You begin to see the structure of the passage itself as another dimension of God’s grace is turned another facet to you, and saying as a result of that grace, live this way. And God constantly unfolding more of those indicatives through history so that the imperatives naturally rise out of them instead of saying, we’re doing something that’s not really there. You get your eyes tuned, and you just start seeing it and it’s a great blessing.

Some of the hard places to really see this are the poetry and wisdom literature passages—because there is no mention of Jesus. In fact at times it seems there’s only, you know, more imperatives, right? What are we trying to do? We expose the grace principles evident in doctrinal statements, literary motifs, or relational interaction. I will confess to you, you will need to use redemptive lenses. What does this text reveal about God and me to expose grace principles?

All right, let’s do what I think are some of the hardest things. You’re in Proverbs and the language is simply, “My son, do not be seduced by the beauty of the woman.” What does that passage tell me about God? What does God value? What am I learning about God in that verse? He’s pure, he values it, he requires it, it reflects his own character. What else do I learn? “My son.” He loves; he loves his children. What do we learn about ourselves? We’re vulnerable; despite being children, we fail. If you look at the structure of the book of Proverbs, we learn something else. It is wisdom. Where does the wisdom come from that keeps us safe in these circumstances? It comes from God, so that when we pick up James in the New Testament, he says that “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives generously and upbraideth not.” He’ll give you much and he won’t get after you for asking for his help. I learned more about the book of James by studying the book of Proverbs and understanding, you know, this wisdom that keeps you safe is from a Father who loves you, and he’s the one who provides the wisdom that you can’t provide for yourself. Now, I will confess it’s not the very first reflex of everybody who approaches the book of Proverbs, I acknowledge that. But once you get your eyes tuned, you can say, “Oh, that’s why he told me in the early chapter that the wisdom was

from him, not from me; that's why the safekeeping is from God. It's not ultimately my wisdom, and he gives me wisdom that keeps me safe and then tells me when I'm vulnerable. He loves me still."

I'm going to move really quickly through the rest. The prophecies and apocalyptic literature—obviously these may be revealing the coming Christ. The Gospels explaining the person, work, and demands of the incarnate Lord; ultimately the Gospels are going to show why Jesus said, "If you love me you will obey what I command," as well as "apart from me you can do nothing." I mean, ultimately the Gospels are saying, "Here's the God who sent his Son because he loved you, knowing that when you perceived he was God incarnate, he was God's gospel visual before us, that we would love him, and when we loved him we would want to do what he wanted." That would be our joy, that would be our privilege to do so. And so the Gospels come to demonstrate that love of God for us, knowing that we would love him and also to remind us that if we didn't have him all the imperatives in the world won't mean a thing. "Apart from me you can do nothing."

The Epistles, obviously, are exposing—we preach by exposing the grace principles evident in doctrinal statements, literary motifs, or relational interactions, and we always show how the imperatives are based on the indicatives. In this particular class you have this semester to deal with biblical narratives particularly, right? So you're supposed to be preaching from narratives, and let me tell you why, guys. I can remember, I've been out of Seminary about 10 years and I visited a pastor friend of mine. And, you know we've both been preaching a while, and I preached in his church kind of a series and at the end of that he said, "How do you do that? You did Bible narratives. I always either do the Psalms or the Epistles because I know how to do them. But I don't know how to preach a story." And my contention will be if you learn how to preach grace from the narratives, you will be able to do it everywhere else. Everywhere else it's going to be kind of given to you. Because the Epistles and Psalms are always going to be establishing the imperatives with the indicatives. But it's so easy to become moralistic when preaching narratives. David was a good boy and you be a good boy, too. So if we can begin to preach the narratives redemptively everything else will kind of take care of itself.

So I want to talk about how we approach these narratives that you have preached from this semester most particularly. Tell us and talk about what we do when we approach the narratives. A, under Roman numeral V. We will use our exegetical systematic skills to explain the text and the obedience required; that's nothing new. OK, we'll still look at the text and say, "All right, what does it say? What's it requiring?" But B: we will begin to use redemptive lenses to identify grace principles in the narrative. We'll ask again, "What does this text reveal about God's provision and human need?" OK, there's the Exodus, that's pretty easy to see, God's provision and human need; but there is a prophet in the desert running from a queen and needing to be fed by ravens because he's scared. What is this telling me about God's provision? What is this telling me about human need? I'm asking the provision and need questions because they'll get me to grace principles. And what I'll do when I do that, when I begin to ask about God's provision and human need, I will identify the grace principles or patterns evident in the text.

Now, all of these are varieties of "God is the hero of the text." As we begin to unfold the story of his rescue we may see deliverance before obedience, which again is the indicative before the

imperative. We may see love before and beyond performance like Gideon, who was a coward and then later an idolater and still was used by God greatly. We may see mercy for the guilty, strength for the weak, covenant love for the unlovely and undeserving, provision for the needy, warning for those who are in error, punishment for enemies as God rescues his people from enemies they cannot rescue themselves from. We may see discipline that is redeeming discipline for the wayward-turning people of unsafe paths and turning people back into God's arms. What we're seeking to do is to motivate obedience required by this text with its grace principles. Now we'll do a whole lot more talking about what it says there next time. We're trying to remember applications for questions.

Thus far, up to the elementary practicum we dealt with what to do, where to do it, instructional situational specificity, and we kind of tipped our hats to why to do it and how to do it, but this semester we're not tipping our hats, we're saying this is the absolute core of the message. Why should you do that and how are you going to be able to do that, and what in the text is providing the grace principles that are there? Now we'll talk a whole lot more about that next time, but if I'm saying God is taking care of what you cannot take care of, ultimately that's going to be both motivation and enablement. Here's what we're doing: we're still going to be using homiletical principles to organize the narrative's features. It's going to be a little bit different for you this time because we'll talk about principlizing main points and sub-points. That is, we will identify truth principles that are supported by the text's features and facts.

Do not state text facts as main points or sub-points that will leave you with no truth to illustrate or apply. Now this isn't so much about being redemptive; it's just knowing how to preach narratives. If you do this: Israel confronted Jericho, Israel marched around Jericho, the walls of Jericho tumbled down. Now as a consequence of that you should march around. . . . What I did is I gave a captioned survey of the facts. All right? Way back in Prep and Del we called this describing the text rather than developing the message. Our goal is not merely to summarize the facts a different way. Our goal is to say, "What truth principle are the facts revealing?" Like, take the same order, the same facts, but we would state it this way: Faithfulness requires facing God's enemies, therefore you should. . . . Well, now I've got something to apply, I've got a principle, a truth principle. Now what's going to support that truth principle? The facts of the text. But main points are stated as principles, not simply as text facts. And that's just kind of a general principle for preaching narratives: word main points as truth principles, not text facts. "Faithfulness requires obeying God's Word." That would be the same as Israel marched around Jericho because God said to. But it's putting in a truth principle. "Faithfulness results in witnessing God's faithfulness"—the walls came tumbling down. So in narratives, to preach them, we put the facts in truth principle statements rather than just as caption surveys of the facts.

We (item number 2), we of course use the text's facts to support the main point and sub-point principles. So it's a little different in didactic passages, the raw material we had available when we were doing the Epistles. What did we have available to us? We had stated truths and propositions, we had a thought flow, we exegeted the thought of that paragraph. What are we doing in narratives? In narratives the raw material available to support the truth claims may be stated truths but they may be exhibited truths—the walls fell down, David was punished. It may be something that's exhibited that supports the truth. It may be a truth that's in the dialogue or that's in the narrator commentary. "The time came when kings went to war and David stayed

home.” That’s just what the narrator says, he wasn’t supposed to; time came for kings to go to war and David didn’t do it. Led to great sin in his life. We may see something in character development or descriptions. There may be something in context, something we know about the culture. What’s the significance of the Passover cup that Jesus used for the Lord’s Supper? There may be something in plot flow. I remember this so much in the conquest as Joshua went in, he was supposed to destroy everything. He didn’t. There may be a pattern. When David was young and was rising as a star in Israel, whenever there was a victory, it says he devoted everything he had to the Lord, he devoted everything to the Lord. He becomes king, he has conquests, but you know it doesn’t say that any more. He stopped devoting things to the Lord. There’s this gap in the pattern of the telling of the story. Some principles being revealed. So there may be story patterns. In narrative passages you exegete actions and events and dialogue. But what you’re looking for is, what truth principle is here? What principle can I establish by the facts of the passage?

Some things to remember as you’re doing these narratives: remember there are legitimate expository options. You can explode a verse or distill a passage. When you’re preaching from the Epistles, what kind of direction are you mostly going? You’re exploding small passages, right? Here are the implications of that verse. But a biblical narrative might run how many verses? Thirty, forty, fifty, seventy, eighty verses, you know; you can’t read all that. So you have to distill. You can’t explain all of it. You say, what are the broad strokes and distill it down.

Just a real quick thing here, it’s not even in the notes I don’t think. It’s where your Scripture intros will help you so much. Remember the Scripture intro? If you’ve got 70 verses please do not read them all. We only have, you know, 25 minutes for you. So what are you going to do? You may summarize a little bit, read a few verses, summarize a little bit more, read another couple of verses, be done, OK? You’re going to read the verses most critical to your sermon. And you’re going to summarize long sections that may not be as critical to the points. So your Scripture intro allows you to deal with large passages in a more efficient way that you can do in your Scripture intro.

Item B, under 3, may be a little bit of a surprise to you. There is not as high an obligation to cite verses as to cite passage content when preaching from a narrative. Now listen, when you’re in Epistles, you want to say, “Look with me at verse 5.” Right? But if you say, “Now, because of this Goliath hit the ground. Look with me at verse 14, it says, ‘Goliath hit the ground.’” You know, chuckle. If everybody knows the story, if it’s plain, there’s not quite as high an obligation to cite the verse. But when you do cite the verse, what are you looking for? Look what it says, “The time came when kings went to war and David stayed home.” You know, there may be very specific things you want people to look to; please don’t get into the habit of not referring to the text at all. Please don’t do that. But recognize if they know the story well you may not have the same degree of obligation to cite the verse as when you were dealing in the Epistles.

Last little hints here. Number 4: Don’t fear miracle passages but remember their redemptive purpose. Lots of you preaching narratives are going to come across miracles and the great temptation is to say, “Well God gave them a great catch of fish, we’re on a fishing trip, so you know. . . .” Chuckle. Is that what it’s about? Look, show how the miracle demonstrates divine status or a divine representative’s authority rather than promising a repeat. OK? So often what

the miracles are about are saying, this is the King of the universe, this is who he is. It's not meant to say, and this will happen to you too. This is who he is. Or this is the spokesman from God who can speak with authority and I'll show you he's got authority. So often, I mean, recognize while there are miracles very present in our awareness, there are long stretches of biblical history, the majority of biblical history has no miracles. They come in cycles, typically when there's some breaking in of some new thing that God is doing, and he's either saying, "Here's my representative" or "Here's my Son." So remember the purpose of the miracles and establish what they were establishing rather than promising a repeat. That will help. Remember, it says there, long periods of no miracles in the Bible. If God is not always promising a miracle, should we?

Last paragraph. By proclaiming the principles of the narrative the preacher is still taking truth to struggle and thus fulfills the purpose of a biblical message. From the beginning we learned that preaching was both about what is true and what to do. Now we're seeing what is true is not simply a doctrinal truth to know or a duty to do, but it's also the redemptive motive and means for God's people to glorify and enjoy him. Most preachers believe that the main goal of the sermon is to tell people what to believe, that is, doctrine; or what to do, more obedience. But the greater goal is hope in him. Only by discerning the grace evident in the text do we provide the hope that makes truth meaningful and obedience possible.

Guess what we're going to do next time? We're going to say, as we now excavate these grace principles out of the text, not importing what's not there, seeing what's actually there in the biblical record for the divine purpose, as we excavate those grace principles: how does it make obedience possible and our hearts willing? That's next time as we'll talk about the import of this in sanctification. See you next time.

## **Preaching Christ-Centered Application (Sanctification)**

Before we get into this material of Lecture 3, let's do a quick review. What I tried to say so far in the previous lecture is this: God is always revealing his gracious character in Scripture in some way, shape, or form. He is showing his people his gracious character so that when Christ appears we understand who he is and what he's done. God is always the hero, he provides, and this becomes most fully manifest in Christ, and we recognize and understand him because of previously revealed grace principles. And we've talked about ways to discern those grace principles in various aspects of Scripture. We've said that the path to see those grace principles can either be a macro understanding or a micro understanding. In the macro understanding, what we're doing is we're saying, "How does this text either prepare us for the person and work of Christ or predict the person and work of Christ?"; or maybe we're looking and saying, "How does this passage reflect the person and work of Christ?" And there are various ways we talked about that. Remember? It can either be by answering the question, "What does this text reveal about God, who provides redemption?" or "What does this text reveal about man, who requires redemption?" So whether or not you're dealing with the macro or you're dealing with the micro—in macro revelation we're not looking at broad sweeps from Genesis to Revelation, but in micro revelation we're saying, "All right, how are grace principles being revealed right here? How is God providing strength for the weak, food for the hungry? What right here is revealing God's gracious character either in relational interaction or doctrinal statement?"

Now, as we're saying that there are these grace principles being revealed in all of Scripture, we have to say why are we even bothering to do all this? And that relates with what we're talking about today: preaching Christ-centered application. How does all this understanding of the nature of grace and all of Scripture affect sanctification, particularly as we're preaching it? Here's the key question: what difference does it make to reveal the redemptive nature of all Scripture? And what I am going to contend is that seeing this grace in all Scripture changes the goal, the themes, and ultimately the application of the sermon. Now, the thing I want to tell you is, at least I think, is the highest goal of preaching and why we are trying to excavate the grace from all of Scripture. And before I get into some of the specifics here I just want to say candidly to you I will understand if what I now say is a struggle for you. I think it has taken me half a lifetime to sense the implications of what it means for the grace of God to be being revealed in all Scripture and how that changes the nature of Scripture. And it's not the way I was trained, not the way I was taught to think, and I'll understand if you feel some tension with what I'm saying. I must tell you even as I teach it to you, even as I try to preach these things, I sense that I am just touching the edge of the reality of what I want to say. But here we go.

If you say, "What is the highest goal of preaching?" I think most preachers examine the text with the sole aim of teaching people either what to do or what to know. That is they look at the text and they think of either the duty or the doctrine. That's what I'm trying to show you—either duty or doctrine that's here in the text. But I'm going to contend that there is a higher goal. It's not teaching people only what to *do* or what to *know*, but rather



teaching people *who they are in Christ*. The ultimate goal of the sermon is not simply proclaiming more duty or doctrine, but promoting a more dear relationship with God. That is really talking about God's love. If the chief end of the sermon is not so much about performance and competence but glorifying and enjoying God—what we say in the Catechism—then we recognize the chief end is not so much about duty and doctrine but it's rather about a relationship. Now how does that change what you look for in the text and what you proclaim from God's Word? What you'll do is you'll begin to look for how the text tells of God's grace to promote love for him. Maybe we'll say even more specifically, the goal of the sermon is to convince people, to have them believe profoundly, that God loves them despite their weakness and sin and frailty, and knowing that, what happens then is they love him. Is that really the goal of the text? To teach people that despite their sin and frailty and weakness the God of heaven loves them.

Think of how Paul says it in Romans 15:4. He says this, "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." That's a different goal than just duty and doctrine. If you say everything that's written, everything that's there is written to encourage us, to give us endurance so that we might have hope; if that's the goal, to teach the people profoundly of the love of God for them so that they have hope in their fallen condition. Roman numeral II relates to the dominant themes of redemptive, that is, Christ-centered, messages, if they have behind them this understanding that we're speaking about the love of God for his people and having people profoundly understand that. Obviously a dominant theme of redemptive messages then is not "sola bootstraps" or "deadly be's" messages—you know, messages about just straighten up and fly right, and God will love you for that. Instead, a consistent message of Christ-centered preaching is one like this: Item A: Grace despite your sin. These are messages of assurance—God loves us because of his grace not our performance; messages of adoption—that our relationship with God is based upon his love for us, adopting us, not our somehow making him our God. It's his work in our behalf. And if you think about how messages of assurance and adoption begin to affect all the topics of preaching, then you can think of things like this: What typical topics come out of assurance and adoption? God's grace despite our sin. It can be something like, "Our comfort in God's love." Now how does that change things? How does that affect things?

When you take a subject like the Sabbath. Now I must tell you whether I was growing up in the church or whether I was a preacher, my greatest concern about the Sabbath was what people either should or should not do on the Sabbath. Now that's still a concern. But I think I often missed what was the point of the Sabbath. You remember that when the Earth was Eden, when man did not live by the sweat of his brow, by his work, that everything was Sabbath. It was a Sabbath day, it was a Sabbath time. And then when he fell, what his sin meant is that he would have to by his own labors, by his own striving, he would have to make his way in the world. But ultimately God would say to his people, "I will give you, along with the commands for your serving and your working, a day of rest. If you will rest in me I can do more in six days for you than you can do in seven days for you. Rest in me."

Now, we have to recognize that command for rest came out of the worst of their labors. They were out of slavery, that they were out of having to make more bricks with less straw, it was out of their labor that they had to make them, and God said, "I will give you rest." Now we know of course that they did not altogether honor that, ultimately when they were released from the Exodus, you remember they were going through the land of Canaan and as they are going from their slave labor to Canaan, God says to you, "You are entering the land of my rest. From your labor to my rest. You are entering the Promised Land." It's the land of Sabbath. And when they failed to honor God in that land of Sabbath and they went to the exile, God said, "I will bring you back to my Sabbath. Again from your slavery back into my rest." So when we get to Hebrews 4, after the people of God still do not understand, they are still thriving and wrestling by their work to make things right with God, the writer of Hebrews says, "Because of the work of Jesus Christ there remains a Sabbath. Not by your work but by the work of Jesus Christ you can again enter my rest." And the book of Isaiah reminds us that at the culmination of all things, when we have been through this veil of tears, when we have labored all of our lives to accomplish, when God finally comes to redeem the world, he says we will enter our final Sabbath.

Our obedience to the Sabbath is ultimately a recognition of God's provision of rest. It's not just trying to get people to do enough so that God will honor them. It's actually getting people to rest in the goodness that's of God. And that's the goal. It may still be about obedience to God but it has a different aim, it has a different way in which it's approaching people and saying what is God wanting to communicate to you of his assurance and of your position in him? Of course you will talk about the comfort of God, all the message of sonship, of our adoption, that God will not love you more because you're better; and the flipside of that, he won't love you less because you're worse. I will tell you that people just can't believe that that's true. God won't love me less when I mess up? He doesn't. You're his child. My child may disappoint me, he may displease me, he may receive disciple from me, but he is still my child and nothing changes that. I will have his best interest always in my heart. And God says, "There is grace despite your sin because of my assurance given through many means and because you're my child."

Messages that will be typical of these redemptive messages are also "Grace destroying the guilt of sin." Messages of justification and forgiveness, typical topics: Our repentance, God's cleansing, our need of pardon and how we get it. Christ's atonement, the necessity of imputed righteousness that God has given us, the wonderful glory of recognizing that everything that's true of Christ by our union with him is applied to us. I'm as holy as Jesus before God. Remember Bunyan's wonderful illustration? It's as though every Christian possesses a magic mirror and on one side I see the reflection which is my own scars and warts and blemishes—I see me for who I am. But on the back side of the mirror is the image of Jesus and God chooses to look at me through that side of the mirror. I have his righteousness; it's mine by the work of my great God.

I will preach messages of grace defeating the power of sin. It's not just that I am pardoned, I am freed. I am freed from the guilt and power of sin. Messages of sanctification and enablement. Typical topics will be the victory that we have over the world, the flesh, and the devil. I'm not hopeless, I am not helpless. Satan says you cannot stop it and I say that's a lie. Greater is he that's in you than he that's in the world. God has worked to give me power and knowing that power is part of my strength. The provision of the Holy Spirit and his Word that enable victory give me hope, and that's part of my strength.

Another constant theme will be grace compelling holiness, that our worship and obedience are ultimately a response to his grace and enabled ultimately by his grace. Typical topics will be those of thanksgiving and praise and gratitude, an ultimately loving service. The reason that I serve God is the reason Jesus said. He said, "If you love me you will keep my commands." He didn't say, "Keep my commands so that I will love you." He said if you really love me, this is going to be kind of the turtle falling off the log, it will just happen; if you love me you will keep my commands because you will delight to please me and you will delight to walk with me, and I've given you the path that I walk on.

It's that last topic, loving service, that we're preaching—service to God out of love for him—that's often the tell-tale sign of Christ-centered preaching, because people worry that emphasizing grace undermines obedience. Consistently preaching the necessity and the proper motivation for holiness may be—I think it is—the most difficult task that evangelical preachers face because we culturally define grace as license, rather than as the biblical power—we can even say the biblical compulsion—of holiness. I mean, the world says grace means I get to do what I want. The Bible says you would love to do what God wants. You will respond in a way that the love of God will now constrain you and grace is building that dynamic into our hearts. We talk...how do we preach grace and still apply the standards of Scripture, particularly if the world and many Christians view those as antithetical? Grace is antithetical to obedience. How do we preach it so that grace is actually the power of obedience? First, I think we just have to have this recognition: recognize that it is not gracious to neglect the Law that reflects God's character and is the path of safety and blessing he provides for his people in a fallen world. I think we just have to start by saying the Law rightly applied is not antithetical to grace. Don't let the world do that to us. The Law is the safe path, the good path, what God intended to be a blessing to his people. Now, going on that path and staying on that path is motivated by grace. Grace is not antithetical to it. In essence what I'm saying by that little phrase there, we still have to do application, we still have to do it. Sometimes people say you can't have any "shoulds" in Christ-centered preaching. No, you must! It's actually ungracious to not tell people what God has given for their good and for their safe-keeping.

So let's talk about the nature of application in redemptive, that is, Christ-centered preaching. We previously understood application (I'm going to go to the board here) to be answering four questions, right? What to do? Where to do it? So this was instructional

specificity out of the text, situational specificity out of our circumstances, but then we've also said there were two more questions: Why and how? Motivation and enablement. If you will, here's where we're focusing now, all right? We are saying if application is still on the page, if we still have to do it for faithful preaching, then we've got to make sure we know what the motivation is and how people can do what we have told them to do. And in essence, it's not throwing away the Law, it's not throwing away application that is making Christ-centered preaching; it's actually giving the right motivation and enablement for it. Just to finish that paragraph on your notes: Traditional preaching takes seriously questions 1 and 2. Christ-centered preaching takes as seriously and hopefully equips us to handle questions 3 and 4, the ones of motivation and enablement.

As you think about the question of motivation, Item A for Application in Christ-centered Preaching, just start with the question: How does the Bible motivate us to be holy? Another way of asking is this: What's your theology of change? How is the Bible changing people, how is it motivating us? My question has to be even more specific. What makes redeemed people more holy? Threat of condemnation or promise of grace? And that's not a new question, as a quick review of Romans 6 will say, right? Should we continue in sin that grace may abound? Hey, hey, it's all grace, sin city here I come! Should we just continue in sin that grace may abound? People are concerned if you talk too much grace you will promote unholiness. So if that's the question always debated how do we answer it?

Well let me just begin with an old illustration. This is again of Bunyan, the writer of *Pilgrim's Progress*. You may remember that Bunyan got a lot of the writing and the ideas while he was in prison. Remember? He was one of the non-establishment preachers. He did not want the authority of the king to be ruling over his choice of what he said and the position he had so he was put in prison. Now he wasn't the only one put in prison. The Anabaptists also rejected the rule of the royal authority and so they were also put in prison. So here you have Bunyan, this Calvinistic Baptist, and you have Anabaptists in prison together facing death as far as they knew every day, so of course what did they do? They debated theology. And the Anabaptists would say to Bunyan, "You cannot keep assuring people of God's love, you cannot do that. If you keep assuring people of God's love they'll do whatever they want." Bunyan's famous answer: "No. If you keep assuring God's people of God's love, they will do whatever he wants." Listen, let's just acknowledge it. Can grace be abused? Of course. But for those in whom the Spirit dwells, for the heart that is not in rebellion, grace is the fuel of obedience. I love him so I want now to honor him. They will do whatever he wants if they really love him and are assured of his love for them.

We need to think of the relationship between compulsion and conduct. Reason, good reason asks, "Why should people be holy if all you keep on doing is assuring them of grace?" Scripture answers that question at a very heart human level. Jesus said, "If you love me you will obey what I command." That's why they'll do it, because it will create love. Or even take the ministry that we have. Paul in 2 Corinthians 5, "The love of God constrains us to preach the gospel." It's understanding what he is for us that ultimately is

the compulsion. Most people, even preachers, think it's getting people to do what they don't want to do. Yet preaching's highest aim and greatest power lies in convincing others of the love of God in Christ that makes the heart willing and able. Hear that? Willing and able. What can I do that will make you willing and able to do what God desires? When we know that God delights in us we desire to please him. Conviction of sin is most necessary, we still have to do that, convict of sin, but its aim is not simply to make people feel guilty, but to enable them to comprehend the greatness of God's grace. You feel so bad but look at how great is the grace that rescues you! Grace liberates from sin's guilt and power by filling God's people with love for him that makes them willing and able to please him. That is providing both motivation and enablement.

Look at how the Westminster Confession states it in the chapter on Christian liberty. It's down at the bottom of the page there. "The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel consists: [this is interesting, we're all free from this] the guilt of sin, the condemning wrath of God, the curse of the moral law, and in there being delivered from the dominion of sin." See that? Free from the guilt and power of sin. "So also in their free access to God and in their yielding obedience to him not out of slavish fear but a childlike love and willing mind."

And you say, "All right I want people to obey God. Is what I'm bringing into the message that's ultimately compelling them creating a childlike love for God and a willing mind, or am I actually utilizing the tools that they are free of—the condemning wrath of God, further guilt, convincing them they are under a power they really aren't under? Are my tools, the mechanisms I am using for application, for the motivation of it, those which create a childlike love and willing mind?" Look at the last paragraph. "Neither are the aforementioned uses of the Law contrary to the grace of the Gospel." OK, the Law has been explained and its implications and requirement, it's not contrary to the grace of the gospel. "But those do sweetly comply with it the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling." Hear that again? The Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that. Now listen to these terms: "freely and cheerfully." Is what I'm doing enabling people to cheerfully obey God, which the will of God, revealed in the Law, requires to be done?

Now these are high requirements for preaching that are now coming out of the Confession, right? We have to have encouragement to obedience that is free of slavish fear. It's motivated by childlike love. Is my application in the message? Yes, it's there. Are people wanting to do it because of childlike love for God? Have I got that into the message? Have I so told them that they are enabled by the Spirit that they will now cheerfully obey him? Did I do that? Did I get that part of the message in? It's really scary when you think about it. I'm supposed to be creating these dynamics as part of the preaching so that I'm not shackling people with what they are free of. How do I do that? How will our preaching accomplish these things? Next page says this: We need to ask again, what better leads to true holiness? Threats of punishment or condemnation or promise of grace? Particularly since we know the Bible says, Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ." Well, I can't condemn them, what power do I have over them?

We need to think about the relationship between our conduct and God's acceptance. Ultimately the question is boiling down to this: Are we holy for God's acceptance, or are we holy from God's acceptance? The first of course is conditional love based upon fear of rejection or punishment—I'm holy for God's acceptance. The second, holy from God's acceptance, is unconditional love based on his perseverance not our performance. I'm holy from his persevering love. That's what I'm responding to, not my performance that's gaining his love.

Now, I always fear a little bit when I'm at this point that I can't say with the earnestness that I want to say things the way I want to say without some way scaring you. I just recognize my own experience. I went from this place and when I graduated from this place with my graduating class our motto as it was at that time was that we would live for the glory of God. It sounds pretty good. But what it really meant was I'll do better than the next guy. And I watched so many of my peers crash and burn within just a few years of ministry because it wasn't just that they were trying to do better than the next guy, they were telling their congregations to do better than the next guy, and I was too. You know people were telling me, "You're such a good preacher," and I thought to myself, "If I'm such a good preacher why are my people doing so bad?"

I went to minister about an hour and fifteen minutes from here at a rural church, and it was the largest church in our presbytery, great stuff. We were eaten up with immorality, with all sorts of substance abuse, with family abuse, with depression, and I thought, "If I'm such a good preacher, why is this going on?" I tell you because people would commend me for my preaching. I don't think I heard my errors ever in my preaching. It was more in my counseling I began to actually hear what I was saying to people. I would deal with a couple who was fractious, maybe coming apart, and I would say to them words like this: "Now listen, if you expect God to love you, you got to straighten up." You hear what I just said? If you expect God to love you, you've got to fix this. And I think despite myself, oh, I could have gotten the right answers on any exams that anyone would give me, but if you kind of examined what was in my heart, in my preaching, I thought I had to force people by fear, by intimidation, by banging on them with the Bible week after week. I had to make them obey God, and in my own heart I thought the reason why they are suffering so much is because they are disobedient. Now there's an element of truth in all of that but I ultimately recognized it wasn't just they who were living conditionally, I was. I believed God would bless or care for me based on how well I did, and that's why I preached that way, it was coming out of my own heart. I mean there was that time I went to my wife and said, "I can't do this any more. You know, I just can't do this any more. I did not go in to the ministry to hurt people. And yet that's all I can see that I'm doing." Why are they in depression? Because I'm teaching them God won't love them till they get better. Why are they in addictions? Because of me, because of preachers like me! Of course they are running from me, of course they want to dull the ache of this world, of course they do! I haven't given them a God who'll help them; I've given them a God who's waiting for them to get better. And it was killing me.

The thing that rescued me, you'll feel strange about this I know, because you read the work. It was Sidney Greidanus, it was reading that awful thing that I had you read of *Sola Scriptura* where he talked about the biblical exemplars and you know, you think how in the world did that help? Because I began to see what I'm telling people is to be like Moses, just do better, just be better, and I didn't know why those biblical characters were there, that God was the hero, they weren't the hero. And it began to just open a world for me I did not know. I would have gotten a good grade on the test. It wasn't what I lived this early in my heart; I was living conditionally, I was teaching them to do the same.

Ultimately what God began to do for me was change me with some of these truths I want you to know. One of these is so simple—it's number 3 on page 3: the relationships between the imperative and the indicative. You know these words from Ridderbos, the imperative rests on the indicative and the order is not reversible. Everybody puts the cart before the horse, right? I'll obey God, then he'll love me. I'll do enough and then he'll accept me. And yet of course we go even to the Decalogue where God says, "Listen, I'm the God who rescued you, that's why you obey me. I didn't say obey me and then I'll rescue you." The imperatives were founded on the indicatives and the order was not reversible. I put the quote of Ridderbos, the famous one, a little bit lower on the page there in the small print. He's talking about Colossians 3 and he says this: "No less striking in this respect [of the imperative resting on the indicative] is Colossians 3:3 where in response to, 'For you have died and your life is hid in God' the command at once resounds. . . ." Now listen, the first is the indicative, right? You're dead! But you're hid with Christ in God. Now there are imperatives that follow. "Put to death, therefore, your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, etc.' Having once died to Christ does not render superfluous putting to death the members that are upon the earth, but is precisely the great urgent reason for it. The imperative is thus founded on the indicative . . . it is immediately clear that the imperative rests on the indicative and that this order is not reversible." If you capture just that it will change absolutely everything, not just in the way you preach, it will change everything in the way you relate to people. The imperative rests on the indicative and the order is not reversible.

When my wife and I kind of just got a glimpse of these grace truths in ministry, we put ourselves under a discipline of change even the way we talked to our children. I mean I may strike you as silly but we had to do it for our own hearts' sake. I would say to my oldest son for instance, "Collin, you are a bad boy because you did that." You hear what I just did? I based who he was on what he did. You are bad because you did bad. In that case I was saying the indicative is based on the imperative. You did not obey, therefore you are a bad person. It may sound silly but I would say to Collin later as I understood more of these things, "Collin don't do that! You're my son! I want you to know who you are, I want you to recognize you are my son. That's the relationship that's motivating you and I want you to know that relationship as the motivation for what you are doing or being called to do." It will change the way you talk to your wife. I mean I think I'm a typical American male—if I've got tension with my wife, what do I do? I either get mad or I get real quiet. I begin to treat her according to her actions. I'll treat you the way you treated me or the way I think you treated me. I should be treating her according to our

covenant relationship. It doesn't mean we don't have things to work through. We've got things to work through but I treat you according to our relationship. I'm concerned for our good, for our faithful lives together. I'm going to treat you according to our relationship not according to your actions. Do we have things to work through? Yes. But it's foundational upon the indicative of who we are. I'm not going to say who we are based upon what we do to one another. I'm going to try to act toward you based upon who we are in the covenant that God has sealed for us. It will change everything. It will change the way you talk to fellow believers who have made you mad. It will change the way you think about the church. Is the imperative based on the indicative? If it is it will change absolutely everything about the way you think about others, the way you talk about them, the way you talk to them and the way you preach.

In Christ-centered preaching what it means, just to fill in your notes here, in Christ-centered preaching what this means is the rules do not change. The rules do not change. It is now not OK to steal. The rules do not change but the reasons do. As one preaches with a redemptive approach, as we say over and over again, I'm not saying that you should be holy for God's acceptance. I'm still saying you should be holy. Rules don't change. But the reasons change—this is FROM God's acceptance that I urge you, it's in view of God's mercy that I urge you to offer your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. It's in view not to gain that mercy. Just to reiterate the Confession here as it speaks of it: "Neither are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the Spirit of God subduing and enabling the will of men to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God revealed in the law requires to be done." Our goal in excavating the grace in every passage is not to minimize biblical imperatives but to empower their application with proper motivation and enablement. I mean, when you read *Holiness by Grace* later this semester, that's all I'm asking you to look for—motivation, enablement, how is God doing that for all of our lives.

The priorities, as it were, of Christ-centered motivations, we think about them, what motivations actually are right to use and how do I use them. The first one has to be love for God. The first and primary motivation for Christ-centered preaching is love for God; that is, revealing the grace in all of Scripture is more than an interpretive scheme. It's the chief expository means by which the preacher may provide consistent adulation—adulation of the mercy of God in Christ in order to prompt our love for God that is the most powerful motivation for Christian obedience. On the next page it says this, "Biblical theology should be more about fostering a relationship than promoting or arguing a science." Now let me tell you why that's there. When John Sanderson was here, when Ed Clowney was at Westminster Seminary, they were professors who a generation ago were trying to teach biblical theology, and they will tell you that they were voices in the wilderness—they felt nobody heard them. And one of the reasons that it was hard for them to be heard was what biblical theology had gone through in the preceding generation and some generations before. This notion of the grace in all the Scriptures is not new. This notion of the exemplars having the purpose of revealing the redemptive work of God is not new. If you say where was it most discussed, it was in the Dutch church a hundred years ago. But it became an argument, it became a science of



hermeneutics where we began to argue: all right, who's got the best master metaphor of how grace is being revealed? Is it kingdom? Is it land? Is it adoption? What is the master metaphor? And so you get all these debates about who has the better science for interpreting the master metaphor of grace in the Scriptures. And what got lost in the process? Relationship. It was about discerning God's love for his people despite their weakness.

I sometimes recognize that as people go out from here—even people who go out from here—it just becomes, you know, this person against that person, this science against that one. I really don't care if you think this method of finding grace is better than that method. I really don't care. My zeal is that you discover what God is trying to do is stimulate in his people love for him through Christ. Because I just foundationally believe, if people love him, if they love him, they will walk with him. And all I'm trying to do is find ways that you can look at the Scriptures and see how God is building that love for himself to revealing his ministry through Christ.

It's what he said, right? Romans 12:1 as Paul summarizes all that he had said doctrinally of all the Scriptures have led to at that point: "I urge you in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship." Hear the holiness required? I'll still tell you I read this verse wrong most of my life. Here's the way I read it: I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, and then you will be holy and pleasing to God. Is that what it says? You be a good living sacrifice and then you'll be holy and pleasing to God. The word holy should have been a clue, shouldn't it? Are you ever going to be holy before God? This is not a statement of what you *will be*; it's a declaration of what you *are*. You offer your bodies as living sacrifices which are by the mercy of God holy and pleasing to God. When you recognize that, that's the transformed mind—that you are not made right by what you do, you are made right because God in his mercy has provided for you. You are holy and pleasing to God—live that way! That's your spiritual act of worship: living out the reality of what he has already done for you. Consistent focus on Christ's mercy, rather than building up a dread of God, most powerfully motivates and enables Christians in their fight against sin and their desire to glorify God. If you don't believe that the next verse won't make sense at all. Remember, Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions. Oh, I thought grace meant yes to everything I want. No, grace rightly understood says if God wasn't there I don't want to be there. Grace teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and ultimately it's understanding all that he's done for us that fills us with that hope and that joy that is our strength. The first and primary motivation is simply love for God.

The second is love for others loved by God. This is what leads to mission and acts of mercy and service to the undeserving. I sometimes hear us, even in our circles, people will be kind of moved more toward justice and mercy concerns. People say, "All right, I'll be merciful toward the deserving poor." What about the undeserving poor? What about the ones that will take advantage of you if you try to help them? You see, grace is

for the undeserving and grace is not known if you are waiting to dispense it only to those who are deserving. But why would we do it? Why would we help people who take advantage of us, abuse our mercy, are undeserving? Well, because Jesus loves them. I love Jesus and that means I will love the ones he loves and I will love the mercy that he wants to show. Ultimately the reason you would read a verse like this, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for these brothers of mine you did for me,” is because you understand what Jesus is saying: “As you care for them, you are actually caring for me. It’s not because you love them. Do you love me? I want you to take care of me then and my priorities for even the least of these.” There’s certain power in the moment, I recognize it, and I recognize it will pass. If you do some of the readings that a lot of the evangelicals now who are celebrating the mercy and justice themes, they will remind us very truthfully that the postmodern ear needs to hear you celebrate justice and mercy. I mean people coming into our church need to hear us as pastors celebrate justice and mercy. They won’t always want to hear that. That movement will change and ultimately what will keep us faithful to God’s purposes is saying, “But I will love those that no one else will because it shows the mercy of God. It’s because of the love of Christ that I do this, not because it’s popular in the moment.”

Another motivation is love for self as one loved by God. These are more difficult themes because love of self sounds wrong. But if I say to you, “Wait a second, I’m a child of the king.” So if I think about hurting myself, if I think the great mark of holiness is that I will feel badder longer about some sin that I have done, I’m not recognizing what God has made me. He has made me precious to him. Granted, I may feel subjective guilt for sin that I’ve done, but I have an obligation before God to love the ones he loves—that means I protect the temple of the Holy Spirit. That means I am concerned if what I see are patterns of thought, or work, or relationship that are damaging to me. Part of my obligation to love Jesus is actually to love *me*. And I think you know believers who think that the mark of their holiness is they feel bad about themselves and to recognize actually that is not recognizing the work that Christ has done for them adequately. Is there right conviction of sin? Of course. But there is a healthy love of what God has done for us in Christ. We want to claim the rights and privileges of our inheritance in Christ.

Some of you know this language of Murray. He begins to say how can we talk about grace and still talk about conditions of God’s affection at the same time? He says it this way: “Grace is bestowed and the relationship established by sovereign divine administration. Grace comes by God’s choice. How then are we to construe the conditions in which we are spoken like the curses and the blessings in the Old Testament? They are simply the reciprocal responses of faith, love, and obedience apart from which the enjoyment of the covenant blessings and the covenant relationship is inconceivable.” It’s saying this: your obedience does not make God love you. But what’s the only way you can experience the blessings of the covenant? It’s through obedience. It’s that kind of conditionality. You will not know the blessings of faithfulness to a spouse if you’re not faithful to your spouse. Doesn’t mean God is conditionally saying I will love you more or less. But the blessings of the covenant still hinge upon obedience,

even though the covenant is sovereignly administered. We are acting upon what God has already accomplished in our behalf.

Love of self also means that we will be concerned about avoidance of the consequences of sin revealed by a loving God. If God did not love us, he would not warn us. Did you ever think of that? I mean, there are real warnings in Scripture. There are real warnings of discipline, there are real warnings of wrath, but God warns us because he wants to protect us. Saving discipline even, if you think of it that way, is always in the context of Fatherly love. Saving discipline expressed toward us regularly in the Scriptures is never, however, retributive punishment. How much of the penalty of your sin did Christ take upon the cross? All of it. How much of your past penalty did Christ take on the cross? How much of your present penalty? What's the hard question? How much of the future penalty of your sin did Christ take on the cross? *All of it. Absolutely all of it.* So what is happening now as we experience discipline is never punitive in the sense that God is desiring to hurt us, in the sense that God is saying, "I'll get my pound of flesh, you crossed me like that." It is never that. There is only loving discipline now whose goal is to build up, to restore, to turn back into his purpose, to protect from danger. So if we begin to preach discipline as though it is punishment we actually abandon our theology. We may experience discipline as a result of our sin but fatherly discipline, even when harsh, is still an expression of love for a child's welfare. It is of course Hebrews 12: "God disciplines those he loves."

Thus there are many motivations for obedience, there are many motivations for obedience—fear of consequences, desire for blessing, love of self that is concerned for others, which is love for others, and of course love for God. But because love of God must be the primary, I almost want you to put it in neon lights. The PRIMARY motivation for holiness—stimulating such love must be the PRIMARY and most consistent concern of our preaching in order for our people to have holy power for their obedience. The message of grace is simply meant to stimulate love for God, and it's compelling power. Biblical theology is just a tool. It's just a tool that enables us to expound and experience this grace that is found in all Scripture and thus rightly apply the whole counsel of God to their lives.

Now I have to put it against improper motivation so let me do that kind of quickly. What are some improper motivations that are contrary to the whole counsel of God? Number one: Making self-promotion or self-protection the primary motivation of obedience. Now let me be very square with you. It's not just you. Most people in our churches are being motivated out of one of two primary motivations. They will obey God so the ogre in the sky will not get them. Listen to me: If the primary reason that you are obeying God is so the ogre in the sky will not get you, who are you really serving? Yourself. It's just self-protection. There is another reason, primary reason, lots of people obey God. They obey God so they will get more good stuff, either in this life or in the life to come. Bigger mentions up there you know? Listen, if the primary reason that you serve God is so that you'll get more good stuff, who are you really serving? Yourself. It's just sanctified selfishness. You cannot serve God until you come to the profound conviction that your

best works merit you nothing. That the reason that a missionary can go on a mission field out of love for Christ and expect to die, to pack his goods in his coffin, is not because God is going to give him more good stuff but because he loves his Savior more than his own life. And the only thing that will create that kind of love is profound understanding, not of personal merit but of divine mercy. God has been so good, I must tell, I must tell. There is of course self-promotion as some people's motivation which is God is the vending machine in the sky who's plugged by our good works, put another nickel of good works in there; or God is the ogre in the sky who's placated by our good works. People will obey this God; they just won't like him very much.

Packer says it this way in *Rediscovering Holiness*: "The secular world never understands Christian motivation. Faced with the question, 'What makes Christians tick?' unbelievers maintain that Christianity is practiced only out of self-serving purposes. That's what they think—the unbeliever—you're just doing this to serve yourself. They see Christians as fearing the consequences of not being Christians (that is, religion is fire insurance), or feeling the need of help and support to achieve their goals (religion as crutch) or wishing to sustain a social identity (that is, religion as a badge of respectability). Now, that's what non-Christians think that we're doing. Candidly that's what lots of Christians are doing, those very things. No doubt all of these motivations can be found among the membership of churches. It would be futile to dispute that. But just as a horse brought into a house is not thereby made human, so a self-seeking motivation brought into the church is not thereby made Christian, nor will holiness ever be the right name for religious routines thus motivated." Isn't that interesting? You can still pray and do all that, it's not holiness. From the plan of salvation I learn that the true driving force for authentic Christian living is and ever must be not the hope of gain but the heart of gratitude.

The Heidelberg Catechism says what I think is one of the most honest questions of all the confessional catechisms you'll find, just kind of straightforward. This question: "Since we are redeemed from our sin and its wretched consequences by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why should we do good works?" Isn't that a great question? Hey, if it's all grace, why be good? Why even bother? You know, he's just being gracious. So if it's not based on our good works, why should we be good? See the answer? Why should we be good, do good works? "So that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God for his goodness and that he may be glorified through us." It's a wonderful statement. I'm living out of thanksgiving to my God. Please don't get hung up on the word "gratitude." I know Piper in *Future Grace* is very concerned about that word and if you define it as he does, a debtor ethic, remember that? I'll make it up to God, I'll be good, I'll make it up to God—if that's what your gratitude is it's worthless. But that's not the biblical definition. If you go to Colossians 3:16, which says specifically, "Let the love of God dwell in you richly, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." What kind of attitude is that? It's not debtor response, it's thanksgiving, it's love overflowing. I want to show my love, I want to give thanks to God. It's not payback. If you're trying to give payback you haven't understood grace, you haven't understood its magnitude. You won't pay it back. But if it's true thanksgiving then that's a wonderful motivation and the way the Reformers typically used that language.

Another wrong motivation beyond self-promotion or self-protection is using what the Reformers call slavish fear rather than Godly fear as motivation. Now what's the difference? It's not personal protection from the ogre in the sky, not that kind of fear. Remember the Bible says, "Perfect love drives out fear." That kind of trembling before the ogre, as it were. Even in the nativity account, in Luke 1:74, we're told this, that Jesus came to enable us to serve him without fear. Amazing thought—we're going to serve now without fear. But now you're going to say, "Wait! The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Isn't there a right fear?" And the answer is, of course. Proper fear in the Bible—the problem is we don't have a good English word. We need Brian Aucker to be in the classroom; no, I'm just teasing! What's the equivalent English word for Hebrew "fear"? And I don't think we have a good equivalent English word. I mean almost always people say something about awe. I don't even think that captures it entirely. I think fear is proper regard for all of the attributes of God. It includes of course his wrath but at the very same moment it includes proper regard for his love.

You know one of the helpful passages for me has been Isaiah 11 that reminds us that when the Messiah will come he will live in the fear of the Lord. Now whatever you think Jesus' relationship to the Father is, it is not "that ogre in the sky is gonna get me." It's not that kind of fear, it is not slavish fear. It is recognition of the awesome greatness, power, and love of God all at the same moment. It's proper regard for who he is. If it's that kind of fear, than it's recognizing even as I dread his discipline I am drawn to his heart. It's that kind of fear. A little example, maybe you've used it other times too. I think of the mom who took her son to the doctor and he was going to have to get a shot cause he was sick, and so the doctor said to the boy, "Son, I'm going to have to give you a shot." And the mom said, "It's not going to hurt, don't worry, it's not going to hurt." Well the doctor knew it was going to hurt and so he said to the boy, "I may hurt you but I will not harm you." I think God in discipline at times expects us to have fear of hurt. No discipline seems pleasant at the moment, but God says, "I will not harm you. You are my child." I don't fear the harm of God. No more, no more. He is my Father and that kind of fear I am freed from and will never feel it again. I am free from the slavish fear before a God who would hurt me out of harm's intent.

Some of our failure in proper motivation is failing to distinguish objective guilt from subjective guilt as motivation. Subjective guilt certainly we will do in preaching. We will have people feel guilty in grieving the Holy Spirit—what is rightly understood as conviction. People are rightly convicted of sin. I grieved the God who gave himself for me. There is right conviction for sin. But that is different than trying to convince people of objective guilt: Now you are guilty before God and he will hate you because of what you did. No, that is gone. There is therefore now no condemnation. Conviction? Yes. Subjective feeling of guilt? Of course. But not condemnation. I do not stand condemned before God because of my sin because of the grace of God.

Now all of this so far has been about motivation, and I want you to kind of feel—I hope you do—to feel the power of that, that what we're trying to do in our preaching is

excavate grace so that we are stimulating love for Christ, knowing that ultimately that is the power of obedience. And that may sound strange because you say, wait, power? I thought it was the motivation. Ultimately I'll contend it's the power too.

Let's talk about enablement—that's Roman numeral V. What is proper enablement in Christ-centered preaching? That is ultimately answering the "how" question. All right, you told me to do something, but how? How do I do that? At the bottom of page 5 it says, "Remember that the 'what' is the 'how.'" As we began in our preaching to say what to do, what to know, that's part of "how." I mean how we obey God comes from knowing the truth; how we obey God comes from knowing what we're supposed to do. So if we said at least part of enablement is knowledge of imperatives, part of being able to please God we have to tell people the imperatives, they have to have knowledge of the imperatives and so instructions made known through the explanation of the text enable us to obey its imperatives. That's part of obedience. But also the "what" of this: the knowledge of our nature is power. Remember in that theology lesson long ago you learned that you were a new creature. In what way are you a new creature? I don't feel new. Because once you were *non posse non peccare*. Remember that old nature, not able not to sin. What are you now? *Posse non peccare*—you are able because greater is he that is in you than he that's in the world. When the Holy Spirit has revealed to you the nature of your shortcomings he does not say, "and it's hopeless." He says, "I am your helper." I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. We are not hopeless now, tomorrow doesn't have to be like yesterday. When I know my real nature I have hope. If I think that I am in an old nature, I just can't help it, it's just the way I'm made, it's probably God's fault. If that's what I really think, I've already failed. I don't have any power now. But if I believe that what the Bible says it's true about my nature that's part of my power. And one of the reasons I'm reading Scripture is God is giving the indicatives: Who are you? Who are you really? If I am more and more drinking in the knowledge of who I am, knowing that's actually part of my strength, what the Bible says about my new nature is part of my strength. It's also ultimately confidence in the Word and Spirit. The Bible is telling me I am not left alone, that I can do all things through Christ, that the Word is informing because I can do and it will give me information so that I can. So knowledge of the Word and Spirit is also why I read the Scriptures, why I am learning the imperatives, why I am seeing what the text says. What I am learning is actually part of the enabling—it's telling me what God requires and who I am. But that's not the end.

As important for me is item B on page 6 at the top—"Remembering the 'why' is the 'how.'" Most of this lecture I've been talking about why we go through the Scriptures and seek to excavate the grace principles that are there, because we are trying to say I want you to love God more, I want you to see how great is his mercy, I want that to be your motivation. But do you recognize that ultimately the "why" is the "how"? When I understand, the great mercy and love fills me up; that's actually my power. Real simple question: What is the only reason that sin has any power in your life? Because you love it; because we love sin more than God. If you didn't love it, it would have absolutely no power. The only reason it attracts you at all is because you love it. Now you may say, "No, no, no. I love Jesus more." I know, but in the moment you loved the sin more than

you loved your Savior. If you loved the Savior more, how much power would sin have over you? It would not.

Look at some of this. Love is—I know it sounds hokey, it’s just so right—love is power. We answer the “why” question because when people truly grasp the love of God they have his strength. The reason that sin has power over us is that we love it. If sin has no attraction to us it has no power over us. How do we undermine the power of sin? We undermine it by filling the heart with love for Christ. That is revealing the grace, that is why we love him. “The way,” —this is John Owen now—“the way that you remove the power of anything is by taking away its life source. The life source of sin is our love for it. Take that away and sin has no power.” How do we take away the love for sin? We displace it. We displace it with love for Christ. This is Thomas Chalmers’ famous sermon, do you remember? “The expulsive power of a new affection.” Hear that? The expulsive power—he said new affections are pushing out something else; the expulsive power of a new affection. The way that we diminish love for sin is by displacing it with love for God stimulated by greater understanding of his grace through Christ.

I’ll go back. It’s not just a hermeneutical method, it’s not just biblical theology, so we’ve got another tool in our tool bag. Ultimately, the reason that we are trying to find God’s redemptive plan, his grace through all the Scriptures, is we’re saying, “Don’t you understand how great is his love for you, how secure you are in him?” So that your reason for obeying God is great love for him. Your primary reason for serving God is love for him, and when love for him is your primary motivation sin has no power.

Now I’m not talking about dispensing with Christian disciplines, I’m not talking about just the practical thing about having accountability partners, all the things that we do to have power over sin. But I’m ultimately driving us to recognize even those disciplines, those accountability partners, what are their duties? Their duties are to be building up a love for Christ. How do most people use Christian disciplines? To barter with God for his blessing. I’ll give you some more of this stuff I hate doing, then you’ll love me; instead of saying, no, the whole goal of the discipline was to drink in, to feast upon the goodness that is God. That’s why you’re doing it. He’s not going to love you more because you read more or longer; that’s not going to do it. All you’re really doing is drinking in more of this that is him.

If you think, there on page 6, of the power of the disciplines, their power is to help us grow love not earn it. Why are we reading, why are we praying? To gain knowledge of God’s expectations. Now that’s why we of course read the Bible, go to church; we learn more about the law, we learn more about God’s provision, his Spirit, but ultimately we’re learning more about his nature. That’s the redeeming work of God that the disciplines are filling me up to know. The other thing I’m doing through the Christian disciplines is learning to walk in the faith of our new affections, which is love for God; our new position of sonship; and our new nature, that is, that we’re creatures. In contrast to what many people are doing with the Christian disciplines, which is bargaining (that’s the earning theory of Christian disciplines); or balancing (the leverage theory—all right, I’m

not perfect, but I've got enough good stuff that I'm gonna balance out the bad, and part of the balancing out the bad is I will go to church this week); or the topping-off theory (listen, I'm not perfect, but God's gonna be gracious to me because he's gonna fill up my imperfections with his grace). By the way, what theory of the atonement is that? That I'm not perfect but I'm better than other people and the way I'm going to get to heaven is God's going to add the grace that I need to "fill her up." Well, you'd be a good Muslim if you believe that. Do Muslims believe in the grace of God? Of course they do! As long as you've been good enough that he can top it off with his grace, instead of recognizing nothing you do is going to make you right before God, only his work. And what the Christian disciplines are about is not filling us up, not doing something; they are only enabling us to understand the feast of mercy that is already there, because when I understand more of why God has loved me and why I now serve him out of love, that ultimately becomes the power.

Charles Spurgeon, in a wonderful discussion of Christian disciplines, said it this way: "The Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self. He tells us we are nothing but that Christ is all and in all. Remember, therefore, it is not thy hold of Christ that saves thee, it is Christ! It is not thy joy in Christ that saves thee, it is Christ! It is not even faith in Christ, though that be the instrument; it is Christ's blood and merits. Therefore look not so much to thy hand with which thou are grasping Christ as to Christ. We shall never find happiness by looking to our prayers, our doings, or our feelings; it is what Jesus is not what we are that gives rest to the soul." [I wish he had said "not what we do that gives rest to the soul."] "If we would at once overcome Satan and have peace with God it must be by looking unto Jesus. Keep thine eyes solely on him. Let his death, his sufferings, his merits, his glories, his intercession be fresh upon thine mind. When thou wakest in the morning look to him. When thou liest down at night look to him."

Think about that. Wouldn't that be wonderful? If what we were doing in those morning devotionals was not bargaining with God to be good to us today because we'll read a little more; but we're simply saying, "Wow, I see Jesus afresh today." And when we go down to bed at night and we pray with our wives for our children and those that we love, that what we're really doing is saying, "Lord let her, let my family, let me see more of Jesus now." Because that will be our strength, that will be our joy. Sometimes I have to have images to make it make sense to me. I recognize I pour the milk for my daughter's cereal every morning. And sometimes I just think, "Lord let me fill up her heart with love for you. Let me find a way to fill up her heart because I know if she's filled up with love for you, she's safe. That's my job today, to fill her up with more love for you."

What I'm trying to have us do in the conclusion is simply this: to learn to preach God's provision of grace as the motivation and enablement behind every instruction; not fail to have instruction, but proper motivation and enablement. The bottom line of Christ-centered preaching is to take people away from themselves as the instrument of healing and teach them from all the Scriptures of the hope they have through God's grace in Christ that will engender the love that is their power. Jesus said it, right? "Apart from me you can do nothing." And so to have people filled up with that wonderful plan of



redemption, with that wonderful story of how God is always loving and moving toward his people for their sake. If that's what we are telling them, we are filling them up with love for Christ, and that is what makes their obedience honoring to God.

Schaeffer said it this way: "We must learn to bow twice: first we must bow to the divine provision (what God provides) before we bow in obedience. Because if we bow in obedience before bowing to the divine provision our obedience is irrelevant and wrong." Hear that? "And wrong." If I haven't first said, "God how great is your love for me!" then anything I do to satisfy him is only selfishness. But if I say, "God, how great is your love for me! I see it. It's on every page of Scripture. I see it" then love for him fills us and the joy of the Lord fills us and the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Next time we'll listen to Clowney, a wonderful preacher, as he does some of this for us and helps us excavate grace from a very unlikely place and then shows us how it deals with application. See you next time.

## **Hearing the Application of Redemptive Principles**

In this lesson we will listen to Edmund Clowney. You are preaching on narratives. When you are in narrative passages, you exegete truth from stated and also exhibited truths. You are looking at a narrative and determining the principles that are there. Remember that you should principalize the text rather than just chronicalize it. You are asking what principles are there. Those principles may be from something stated, but they also may be from something exhibited. You will begin to see as we progress through Clowney's message that much of what we have talked about in terms of illustrations being effective is also what happens in narratives. You will have descriptions of time, place, people, situations, or plot developments. All of those things are communicating in some way. We will hear how Clowney uses the aspects of the narrative to build what he is saying. We will also hear that on occasion in dialogue, in the way that one character speaks to another or even the way the narrator speaks to the reader is significant. There are ways we use illustrations to make points that you will now see in biblical narratives. They are doing very similar things. Clowney is great at retelling the story in contemporary terms so that we see the truth. I will point out some of these things as we listen to Clowney.

I am not asking you to follow Clowney's method. We will still have main points and subpoints from the text. We will still have explanation, illustration, and application, or some version of that. For much of his ministry, Clowney was the voice crying in the desert. He was the first major theologian in Reformed American circles to talk about the redemptive-historical method. He thought that for much of his career no one heard him. Later in his life, particularly when he hooked with Tim Keller and John Sanderson, who was a student of his, things began to multiply. One of the reasons it struggled was that even though Clowney could exhibit the redemptive-historical method in amazing and wonderful ways, there was not a homiletical method that was easy to follow. You will discover that when you listen to his message. Regardless of what method you follow, you must still have organization and unity. We are going to follow the broad strokes of Clowney, but I am not asking you to follow his method. Listen for the principles in his message.

Let us start listening to Clowney's message. I will stop it frequently and make observations as we go.

I would like to talk with you tonight about a very important word from the Old Testament, the word devotion. It is a word that is often used in the context of the love of God for His people in the Old Testament. It is a word that is translated "lovingkindness." It is the Hebrew word *chesed*. Of course, on academic occasions you have permission to use the Hebrew word to make that clear, but on no other occasion. On an academic occasion like this, however, we can bring in a Hebrew word. The word is *chesed*. It is a good idea to get used to that word because there is not an English word that is an exact equivalent. "Lovingkindness" does not quite give the precise meaning. I want you to think about that word, and maybe we will get a little better understanding of it as we reflect on it together in the Scriptures.

That was an introduction. What is this message going to be about? It is going to be about *chesed*, with the English word being “lovingkindness” or the word he used the most, which was “devotion.” He told us what he was going to be talking about. We get the theme announced, the unifying concept of the message, as it begins to unfold.

In order to understand the word a little better, I would like to read a passage from the Word of God. It is a passage in which the word does not occur. Nevertheless, it is a passage that will help us understand the word. It is found in the twenty-third chapter of 2 Samuel, beginning with verse 13. This is 2 Samuel 23:13-17: “And three of the 30 chief men went down and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam. And the troop of the Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim. And David was then in the stronghold and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David longed and said, ‘O that one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!’ And the three mighty men broke through the host of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate and took it and brought it to David. But he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, ‘Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?’ Therefore he would not drink it. These things did the three mighty men.”

I think it is clear to you that here is a passage that describes for us the devotion that David’s men had for him. It is a passage that also shows us the devotion that David had for the Lord.

Now we have his organizational scheme. He said this passage is about two things. First it is about the devotion of David’s men to David. So first of all it is about the devotion of men to man. He said the other thing it is about is the devotion of David to the Lord, the devotion of man to God. Even though it went by quickly, that is his organizational scheme for what is going to happen. We are going to follow that organizational scheme as we go.

In this passage, there is a gift of devotion that is brought to the king. There is also a gift of devotion that the king offers in his devotion to the Lord. I want to think with you about this matter of devotion, for the term *chesed* means, to begin with, something like “loyalty.” It is the kind of term that could describe tribal loyalty.

Whenever you start something by saying, “The meaning of the term is,” what form of argument are you doing? What are you doing with your terms? You are simply defining them. To define what *chesed* is, we now have an argument that is proceeding by the form of definition.

Let me give you the big picture for this lesson. First we are going to hear Clowney preach a very traditional message. Then he is going to tell us why it is not redemptive. Then he will move back across it. It is a great message to hear what redemptive versus non-redemptive messages will be like. We are going to try to get his scheme in front of us. Here is what he is going to try to do. He is going to retell this story, and he is going to say, “Here is what *chesed* was like back then. Here

is what it would be like in contemporary terms.” He will give positive and negative points for both. He is not just going to speak in terms of then and now, but he is also going to give negative and positive examples. He is going to give a long explanation that is definition by retelling the story. The definition is what *chesed* is, what biblical devotion is. He already gave you one example. He already said that *chesed* is like tribal loyalty. That is an understanding that is removed from us culturally. He will have to bring that closer. Listen for how he does it, because he is really a master.

It is the sort of thing that we encounter in our civilization mostly in the sports world. Here [in Saint Louis, MO] you have the team known as the Cardinals. In Philadelphia we have the team known as the Phillies. Obviously, if the Phillies become the champions, they will earn it by seniority. They are called the “Wheeze Kids.” The Philadelphia Phillies demand loyalty of their fans. It is not enough to be mildly loyal. You are supposed to be a fanatic. You see this in the sports world. We have much of that in the United States, but in England it is worse. They tear down the stands at soccer matches in Liverpool. There has to be this intense loyalty for a team. We have some understanding of it there in a strange kind of caricature in modern life. It could also be said, however, that there is more patriotism around these days than in earlier times. So maybe there is a little loyalty also to our country. There is loyalty to America. Around the world, nationalism certainly expresses the loyalty of men for which they are willing to live and die. You see there is a loyalty that can be carried to the pitch of devotion.

That is what you find in these men that were with David. We are not sure just what period this was in the life of David. Perhaps it was in the time after the death of Saul.

All he has done so far is say that loyalty you might know, but it is *chesed* that we are talking about. Devotion might be something that is tribal, but we can compare it to sports and compare it to patriotism. Yet actually we are talking about David’s men. Now we are going to ask what devotion looks like among David’s men. To make us understand that, he will use many of the same patterns. He will begin to tell us the narrative. What is the time of this? David is out in the desert. Saul’s troops are out after him. He begins to describe time, place, people, and situations. Listen to him for a while, because it is all going to be “back there” somewhere. Then listen to how he comes into our reality. He helps us understand how that would be understood in today’s terms.

It was during the period the period before David had begun his wars against the Philistines. In any event, David is out in the wilderness, in his old haunts where he had been when he was hiding from King Saul. He is beginning to rally men to him there in the desert. He is at a strong point in the desert. Men are coming to volunteer for his cause. Among them there are these three men.

The passage that I read is not given to us in Scripture at the time that it happened. It is given where we have a kind of recap of David’s mighty men. We are given the account of

the knights of David's "round table," those who had done great exploits in the service of David. We are told that these men came to David as volunteers out in the desert, and when they came these three men heard David say on one hot afternoon, "O, that somebody would get me a drink of water from the well in Bethlehem." David was only expressing a wish here. Even the form of the language makes that clear. The three men, however, hear him, and they are loyal. They have *chesed* with respect to the Lord's anointed, with respect to the king, David. They hear him say, "I would like a drink of water from the well in Bethlehem." So one of them said to the other, "You heard what the chief said?" "Yes, I heard him." "He wants water from the well of Bethlehem." The other fellow said, "Let us get it." He puts on his sword. They get a clay pot. They go to get the water.

The problem is that Bethlehem is in a town that is now occupied by the Philistines. When David said he wished he had water from the well of Bethlehem, he was wishing for something that seems completely unattainable. It is a garrison city of the Philistines. He cannot get water from Bethlehem. I do not know what David was thinking about when he wanted to have that water. I do not know if it was nostalgia. You know that Bethlehem was his hometown. He knew the well, and he had often had a drink there.

All he is talking about is David wanting a drink from Bethlehem. It is all David's experience. He has already done something to help us better understand the situation. He said that David's men are like the Knights of the Round Table. We get something tied to our experience more. Listen to how he is going to push everything, including taste, smell, feeling, and sentiment, in order to make us understand what this ancient account is about.

Maybe he liked the water. Some of you are nostalgic about a spring from the land of your youth. Since I was raised in Philadelphia, I get nostalgia only when I go to swimming pools because only there do you get the chlorine density that filled Philadelphia water. Nevertheless, there are some people who are quite nostalgic. Maybe they had great water in that well in Bethlehem. Then, maybe he really wanted to taste some of it.

I do not think, however, that it was only nostalgia, if it was that. I think it is an expression of David's longing. He is the Lord's anointed. He knows that God has made him to be king over all the land. Here he is, God's king, but he cannot even control his own hometown. He cannot even go to the well of his own hometown to get a drink of water. It did not mean that they did not have any water where David was. They could not have had a strong point without some source of water. On that hot afternoon, however, when David was thirsty, he was saying in his heart, "O Lord, when will I prevail? When will your promises be sealed to me? When will I be able to go again to Bethlehem and drink the water from that familiar well by the gate of Bethlehem?"

By now, however, the three men are on their errand. They are heading out across the desert. They have to go to Bethlehem. I do not know how the Philistine army was

organized. I do not know where they had the first line of defense or where there were people on guard or on watch duty. We know, however, that they had to break through the host of the Philistines. At some point their approach was noted. At some point they had to begin fighting. By battle they had to make their way. Perhaps they broke through one line and then went running up the road that led to Bethlehem. They had to go right to the gate of Bethlehem. The gate was always the command post of an ancient city. That is where the generals would be. That is where the captains of the host would be assembled, near the well in Bethlehem. It is roughly analogous to saying, "Go get me a drink of water from the cooler in the Kremlin." It is not out on the periphery somewhere. It is all the way in. They had to go fight their way in to get to the well of Bethlehem. I do not know whether they pulled up the water or whether some woman drew the water for them as they fought off Philistines. Yet they got the water. Then with the water in their possession, they had to get out again. I expect they had to fight their way out as well as fight their way in. At last they were clear of the Philistines and going back across the desert. Perhaps that was the most difficult part of all, the last miles carrying that water without drinking it after all that fighting. Yet they had the water, and they brought it back, and they came to David.

They said, "Chief, you said you would like a little water from the well in Bethlehem. Well, here it is. We got it for you. Here it is." Then David did something that distresses some of the commentators. David took the water, and he poured it out on the ground—all of it. There was a little wet space in the sand. Then the sun came out, and it was a little dry space.

That is so simple, but it is so effective. Can you not see it in your mind's eye? First there is a little wet spot. Then after the desert sun there is a little dry spot. All he had in the text was that David poured out the water. Yet he wanted you to feel what that was like. What are other things he did to engage your present understanding of this Old Testament account? What are some other things he did to bring it in close? He does much rephrasing. In his retelling, he also rephrases things outside the biblical language so you can understand. He also fills in the action. They fought in and they fought out. He really is a master. I listen to him sometimes and think, "The Bible does not say that." Yet he usually says, "I imagine," or "I do not know, but." He fills in necessary details. In other words, in order for the account to have happened, something like that would have had to happen. If he merely filled in the gaps, by saying something like, "They met a woman there, and she said this," then we would say, "It does not say that." Yet it is creative storytelling within limits. It may be near the boundaries sometimes, but it is probably within limits.

What are other things he does to engage you? When he is retelling the story, what are thing he does to say what it means in our time? By the way, this was from the 1982 graduation ceremony here at Covenant Theological Seminary. I suppose the Phillies and Cardinals were in some kind of pennant race at the time. There was also the dialogue: "The chief wants some water; he does. Let us get him some." Those words are not in Scripture, but they had to say something to one another that reflected that. So Clowney retells the story in a way that engages us. All we are

doing right now is asking what devotion looks like. What is the definition of devotion, and how do we see it exemplified or exhibited in this passage? That is all we have done so far.

Those men, at the risk of their lives, had got David that water he wanted to drink so much. Yet when they brought it to him, he would not drink it. How thoughtless David was! Well, you know better than that. It was not thoughtless at all. David did exactly the right thing. Why? It was because David said, “Men, I do not deserve this. This is not just water. This is, as it were, your blood. You put your lives on the line to get this water for me. I cannot take it from you and drink it just like that. David said, “There is only one thing that I can do with this water. I can only give it to God. It is too holy for any other use.”

What wonderful tact David had. What wonderful understanding he had. What a wonderful leader among men he was. What a wonderful king among God’s covenant he was. You see what he did. He saw that this was not his right. He saw that this was not something he could take for granted, the kind of loyalty that these men had shown. He saw that this was God’s work in their hearts and in their lives. Therefore he wanted to give it back to God, from whom it had come. It is a wonderful lesson in leadership.

Is not David a great guy? Is not David a wonderful leader and example? Do you not just wish that you could only be like David? Be careful. You are being led down the primrose path, and he knows exactly what he is doing. As he does it, he begins to give us application. He said, “Here is what such devotion would look like in leadership.” He begins to apply it to various forms of leadership. So far everyone is nodding their head. You see devotion. That is what you should be. That is what David was. Therefore we should be leaders just like this. Now he is going to apply the various places in which such leadership should be.

Think of the strength of this. It is instructional. We have a principle of the devotion of sacrificial leadership. We have a devotion to work from. Now we are going to get situational specificity as well. He is going to tell us where you should apply this. In terms of the four questions of application, he is doing great on the first two. Listen to how it unfolds. Regarding what to do and where to do it, he will be very clear.

You young men are preparing to be ministers of the Gospel. All of you, whether that is your purpose or some other form of leadership in the church of Jesus Christ, others will honor you for the work in which you are engaged. Particularly those of you who may be called to the ministry of the Gospel, the members of your congregation will show to you often great devotion. You must, like David, receive that for what it is—devotion given to you in the name of the Lord. Therefore it is devotion to God. You must receive that gift of their devotion, and you must offer it to God in devotion to Him. Remember that is what the apostle Paul did in the letter to the Philippians. The Philippians had sent him a gift. You remember that the apostle Paul said that the gift they had sent was like “an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice well pleasing to God.”

So when people serve you, you should recognize that it is ultimately service to God. Devotion to God means accepting human service as ultimately what is being offered to God's honor. These are good universal truths. These principles are fine.

Beware of the Jim Jones mentality. If you are thinking, "Of course people will be devoted to me," beware of thinking that you deserve to be treated with great respect and great sacrifice on the part of other people. For what is it that binds the church of Jesus Christ together? It is this kind of *chesed*. It is this kind of loyalty that its members have to one another and to their leaders. Their leaders must also have it to them. There are some people around who are so ready to serve, so ready to show real devotion, that you have to be careful what you say in front of them. Do you know some friends like that? You say you want something, and they will just go get it. They are like David's mighty men.

If it were not for people like that, the ministry of the church would never go forward. Do not think the ministry of the church really goes forward because so many ministers have learned the art of arm-twisting. Do not think that the church goes forward because people can be cajoled or brow-beaten into doing the things that they have to do if the work is to get done. No, what brings the work of the church forward is devotion. It is *chesed*. It is people who show that kind of dedication. It is the kind of people around who are always ready to go and get water from that well.

Some of you may know that movement that is spoken of as the Washington Fellowship movement. It is a movement that has majored in that very quality. They are men who meet together for breakfast once a week and pray together and share with one another and become accountable to one another in their Christian lives. Men in those groups are ready to do anything for their brothers, to drop anything, to go anywhere, to make any sacrifice for one of their brothers for whom they pray every week. That is a good example to all of us. We must show the attitude of David's mighty men.

Now it is not just be like David, it is also be like his mighty men. Again, these are not wrong messages in themselves. They are wrong messages by themselves. We have nothing to criticize here. You certainly do not want to be a selfish leader or a selfish person.

When that attitude is shown, then it has to be received in this same spirit. For how sad it is when you do find the attitude among Christian leaders who think that they have everything coming to them. When you bring some Christian leaders water from Bethlehem, they say, "Where is the ice?" You never can do enough. No matter how well you try to serve them, there is always a criticism. There is always something you did not do right. Christian parents, beware of that attitude. Sometimes we are so critical of our children that even when they do something for us we only can criticize the way they did it instead of realizing what they were trying to do to serve us. What tact, what wisdom David shows, for he takes their devotion, and he offers it to God.

Is not David a great guy? Look again at 2 Samuel 23. He is going to take you somewhere that is



important if you were only going to say, “Be like David.”

Of course in doing that, David is also claiming God’s own promise. He wanted the water from Bethlehem because he wanted the sign of the victory that God had promised to give him. If by God’s power three men can go through the whole Philistine army, then he knows that God is going to give him the victory. That water from Bethlehem becomes a pledge of the victory that David knows will be granted to him by God.

When we look at the devotion of David’s men to him, and when we look at the devotion of David to the Lord, we are tremendously impressed by that bond of *chesed* that ties together the people of God’s covenant.

He has said it again. “My subject is devotion. We have been tremendously impressed by the devotion of men to man. And we have been tremendously impressed by the devotion of men to God.” That is what the account says, and it certainly has moved us.

Yet we are also drawn to something else. We are drawn to the fact that it is God who redeems His promise to David. We are drawn to an amazing truth that the word *chesed*, although it does mean loyalty, and it does mean devotion, is used in the Old Testament scarcely at all about the devotion of men to men, nor even of the devotion of men to God. The Hasidic group of the Jews uses this term today to describe themselves as the devoted ones. In the Old Testament, however, this term is used almost exclusively for the devotion of God to men.

Think about that. God had promised David victory. It was the Lord who gave David water from Bethlehem. It was God’s faithfulness to David that gave him men like that and gave the men the ability to break through the host of the Philistines and give to David the water from Bethlehem. David, the Lord’s anointed, knew the *chesed*, the lovingkindness, of God.

I would like to read to you a few verses from the end of this chapter. Be patient with me. It may seem a little strange, but listen to these verses. “Hezro the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite, Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite, armor bearers to Joab the son of Zeruiah, Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite, Uriah the Hittite; thirty and seven in all.” This chapter about David’s mighty men, this chapter about the men that were devoted to David and were ready to lay down their lives for him, this chapter closes with this list of 37 mighty men, 37 devoted ones, 37 heroes of David’s army. The last one to be named is Uriah the Hittite.

You know who that was, for later, when David was well established in his kingdom and had the luxury of remaining back in Jerusalem while his army was in the field, you remember that David saw Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and he lusted after her and had her brought to him. Then when he learned that Bathsheba had conceived of that

union, David did that despicable thing. Do you remember what he did? He had Uriah brought back from the army, assuming that Uriah would go home and sleep with his beautiful wife. Yet Uriah did not do it. He stayed in the palace. Why? It was because of his *chesed*, because of his devotion to David. He was a soldier on service. David had brought him back from the army. He did not know what the chief had in mind, but he was loyal. He would not go home because he was on duty. When David saw that that was his determined purpose, he sent him back to the army with a message to Joab to put him in the front of the battle and to retire from him so that he died. Joab did what David requested. So that his own generalship would not be criticized later when he described the maneuver, he added the sentence, “Your servant Uriah is dead also.” David murdered Uriah.

So David is not such a good guy. Would David say, “Be like David?” There are certain aspects of his life that are exemplary. Yet there are certain aspects of his life where God surely must rescue him. The story is not complete until the rescue is fully known.

Friends, why do we have this account from the Old Testament? This account shows us God’s faithfulness to David. This account tells us so frankly, so starkly, of David’s unfaithfulness to God, David’s breach of *chesed*. For David, who could show such sympathy and understanding when he poured out that water rather than drink it, that same David could have another man just like that—maybe Uriah was one of the three—he was ready to have one of his mighty men murdered so that he could have his quiet life. Why does the Word of God give us this? You know why.

This is absolutely critical. He is asking the key question. Why is this really here? It is not just to say, “Be like David.” Why is it here?

It is because the Old Testament narratives of God’s dealings with Israel are leading us forward to the great work of salvation that God would do when He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. We are given that image of the kingship under David in order that we might be prepared to know Him who is God’s true Anointed, Jesus Christ. We may praise God tonight, my friends, if we have that picture, that incident from the life of David, to remind us of Jesus Christ, of the King that we have. For we are not called to make our earthly loyalties ultimate. We see the danger of a nationalism that is utter devotion. We see the danger that comes when men are totally devoted to another man. There is only One who deserves our ultimate devotion. That One is the God-man, Jesus Christ.

It is sweet that at the end of that account of David’s mighty man you have the name of Uriah. You marvel at that. It is a skilled biblical writer who has written that material in that way. It is the cherry on top to tell you what to look for. Let me ask you, however, if Uriah had not been mentioned at the end of the message like that, could you still have preached this message redemptively? There is not always going to be the cherry on top. If you had the narrative but not the listing of names with Uriah at the bottom, could you have preached this passage

redemptively? What would have been ways to do that?

You still know how the story of David is going to go. You still know that David is going to fail. His children are going to fail. At the end of his life, he is going to number his troops in a step of arrogance. Nothing in interpreting this passage says that you have to suddenly go blind to the rest of David's life. To interpret this passage apart from David's life is not truly to interpret it. It has a context within the life of David. That is near context. If we were doing micro redemptive-historical method, we would say that we understand that David is not the ultimate leader.

Even though David is not the ultimate leader, what promises have come to David? He is going to have an eternal kingdom. He is going to sit on the throne forever, and his progeny will. We know all the awful things about David, and still we know, despite his unfaithfulness, even to the people who have been so good to him, his own people, God is still going to be faithful to David. That is expanding things a little further. That is taking the redemptive-historical method further out. The redemptive-historical method lets us offer another way that God is showing his grace to David.

What else could I do? Could I extend further? I could go backward as well as forward. David is a chapter in the life of the covenant people that is much more extensive. That covenant-keeping God is again the hero of the text, despite David's failures here. Clowney used the language that "this account is leading us forward to a greater King." That is very familiar language. God provided His king in this covenant succession. Yet this account is leading us forward to the need of a greater king.

Quite often when I am preaching on Old Testament narratives, I will say something like, "Here is grace in Old Testament clothes." There is some way that God is acting that is showing us His nature in this account. We know that about David. Does David lose his kingship because of his affair with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah? No. God still maintains his promise.

Are there other ways we could go? There are cues throughout the passage. What if you had not told the whole account? David is outside his own home city, which is Bethlehem. Without leapfrogging to Golgotha, is it significant that the Lord's anointed is not able to get into his own hometown? How is he ultimately going to get into his own hometown and rule over it? God is going to have to provide it for him. The king of Israel is outside, and he cannot do it. God has to act on David's behalf.

I want to say there are different ways of doing this. You could use the macro interpretation. You could also come in much closer. You could say there may be things here that show me the grace principles and patterns most fully represented in the grace of Christ. Yet what grace principles can be seen here as well?

You may be asking how to identify grace principles and patterns in different types of biblical genre. We have looked at narrative and recognized the problem of saying, "Be like David." How do you begin to see grace in other forms of biblical material? You can expound various

biblical genres with Christ-centered lenses.

How are redemptive truths evident in historical narratives? God's plan may be evident in historical narratives in various ways—symbol and sacrament, promise leading to deliverance, an unconditional covenant being established, and engrafting of the undeserving, such as Ruth or Rahab. There are various ways in which God's plan is exposed in biblical narrative. God's character may be evident in some way in the biblical passage. It may be through His interaction with His people or through the behavior of some individual representing God. God's grace may be stated in some way in a biblical narrative. Maybe the narrative will say it or a character within the story, or it may just be the way the plot unfolds that shows that God will be gracious to the undeserving.

How are redemptive truths evident in the Gospels? It is identifying how Christ is being presented to His people and the role of that particular narrative in the Gospel passages. As a reminder, sometimes the miracles serve as proofs of Christ's authority or identity rather than a promise of repetition for all people for all time.

How are redemptive truths evident in the epistles? It may be by statements, by context, or even by key terms that are used. Sometimes the epistles will have key terms, the most key of which is "in Christ." That is the union with Christ terminology. There are also all the doctrinal terms that you are familiar with.

How are redemptive truths evident in poetry and wisdom literature? Candidly, that is the most difficult. Where it is simple instruction, such as "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is older he will not depart from it," you may ask, "Where is redemptive truth there?" The way you begin to see it is to recognize that you have to read the redemptive truth from the whole of a wisdom genre, not just from individual verses. Redemptive truth is often a response to or a journey to an understanding of God's mighty acts, His faithfulness, His love, or His wisdom. Redemptive truth in prophecy is more obvious in terms of the prophecy when it deals with God's provision through Christ.

I am going through that quickly, because I recognize that if I went through it in detail it would not stick. You are going to have to work through and preach those passages. You may have to work through it with some reference material in order to see it.

In this course, we are still going to do main points and subpoints from the text. We are still going to ask what in that account is proving that principle you just said. That is not going to change. Main points have to be from that text, and the subpoints that you are establishing have to be exhibited or stated in that passage. We will still have an illustration for every main point. The narrative itself may serve as the illustration. If you retell that portion of the narrative, then it is possible that the narrative itself can serve as the illustration. There still has to be an illustration for every main point. We are still going to rain down key terms from these principles in the main points and subpoints to the illustrations. We do that because we have to apply these things. These truths ultimately have to be applied.

We are concerned in this course that you answer all four questions of application. The questions what to do and where to do it are still necessary. Ultimately, however, are you motivating through these grace principles that you are discerning in the text? Are you creating love for God that is the motivation for following these instructions? The more difficult question, which you will probably wrestle with for the rest of your life, is how do people do what they are told to do? You want to create the love that is the power. Do you remember “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection”? To build love for Christ that undermines the attraction of sin is the goal. If it does not attract you, it has no power over you. There are other things as well. There are practical suggestions of accountability and Christian disciplines. Even those, however, are about building love for Christ, or they actually destroy true godliness. If they are just about earning merit with God, then they actually destroy faithfulness. What I am doing with these practical means of following God is learning to love Him more.

There are things that I hope you leave with from these lessons. If you get the first one alone, I will be happy. God is the hero of every text. Gideon is not the hero. Joshua is not the hero. David is not the hero. Ultimately God is the hero. The text points to the rescue that God provides. Somehow that is occurring. The reason we started with fallen condition focus (FCF) at the beginning of Preparation and Delivery of Sermons is because if you really identify the burden of the text, the fallenness that requires the truth, then divine solutions must be given. By dealing with an FCF, you will always force yourself to bring God to the rescue. Redemptive truth has to follow from what you are doing.

As you begin to look for redemptive truth, use the two lenses. What does this tell me about God, and what does it tell me about me? What does the life of David tell you about God? He is amazingly patient, faithful, covenant keeping, and true to His promises. All of those things you know about God He ultimately provides for those who deserve none of it. What do we learn about ourselves? Even the best of us can be guilty of horrible betrayal of God. I learn about myself, and I learn about God.

I learn about the “deadly be’s.” I preach these things and still sometimes I walk away from a sermon and say, “What did I just do? All I did was tell them to straighten up and fly right.” At least we have a tool to determine when we do that. At least when I walk away I can recognize it for its error. If it was only moral instruction, then I recognize that is insufficient for a minister of the Gospel. People are Swiss cheese. They have holes in them. Are you going to tell them that simply doing better things will fill the hole? Ultimately it has to be the work of God. That work of God will be revealed as you begin to look in passages for these grace principles. How is God’s grace displayed here? It is ultimately revealed in Christ, but even here, how am I seeing it displayed? What changes you, and changes your preaching, is when you begin to recognize that if you have begun with that FCF, the burden of the text, what the people are struggling with, then your goal in preaching is to take truth to struggle. That is where you begin to become a physician of souls that is so beautiful to your own heart. You are taking truth to struggle, not just heaping more information or more behavior responsibility on people. I am actually bringing the grace of God into their lives by dealing with that hope that they need. The common denominator of all great preaching is that it is about hope. It is giving people hope. If

that is what we are doing, even though we struggle with particular passages, if our aim is to give people hope in their fallenness, then the struggle is well worth it. Your preaching will become a beautiful thing.

What you often find in those who are extreme followers of Vos is such an emphasis on the “why” and the “how” that the “what” and the “where” fall away. There is no instruction. To give instruction is looked down on. The other side of that is straight legalism in which the “why” and the “how” fall away and all we get is “what” and “where.” What I think is the true Calvinist tradition is to say that the Law does not fall away. The Law is the safe path. It is the path not only of God’s glory but also of good for us. What makes us not only walk down the path but also not stray from it is love for Christ. If you ask how to live out love for Christ, we can answer that if you love Him then you will keep His commands. It is glorious to Him and good for us, just as loving my wife faithfully is good for me. I want us to keep both sides together. We do not want to say “law or Gospel,” but rather there is Gospel motivation for what glorifies God and brings us good. It is not ignoring “why” and “how” that would indicate if I do good then God will love me more or make my life better. That is making the Law conditional or God’s love conditional upon your obeying the Law. That is how most people live. I am weighing in against that while weighing in against antinomianism at the same time.

To what extent does the FCF have to come from the text? The wording of the FCF does not have to come from the text at all. Yet the meaning of the FCF has to be derived from the text. There must be something in the text or context that says why it was written. What was going wrong? What was amiss? What was the burden of the writer? That must at least be determined by the text or its context. You must be able to prove that the ultimate meaning of the FCF is there in the text or context. Yet you can word it 1000 different ways. It is just as we talk about with a proposition. You can word a proposition 1000 different ways, but you have to be able to prove that the proposition is in the text. You have to be able to prove the FCF is actually what the biblical writer had in mind. That in itself is an exegetical task. In any given narrative, there are multiple possibilities for the FCF. The hermeneutics professors talk about a difference between meaning and significance. Meaning does not change, but its significance could have many categories. As I consider the FCF of a passage, I may say, “This passage is meant to deal with peoples’ distrust of the love of God.” That is one possibility. Then I have to consider how I will approach that pastorally. There could be multiple wordings of the FCF that deal with the significance of the truth that is there. I still have to be able to prove that it was the concern of the biblical writer. That basic meaning question cannot vary and still be true to the text.

I stopped playing the brief remainder of Clowney’s message because he simply goes back over his applications and reapplies them redemptively. How do you keep from tacking on the redemptive message? Or worse, how do you keep from doing what Clowney did every week? If you did it every week, then people would just wait for the ironic twist. It is the recognition that there are different legitimate strategies. Sometimes we will say that if Christ has provided His grace for you then what are the implications? So we may lay the grace foundations at the beginning. Other times we will build a case all the way through. What else did God do? What else did God do? What else did God do? Other times we may try Clowney’s method. Here are all

these things you must do, but let me tell you something. If your heart is not right with the Lord, you have absolutely no chance. Therefore I have to tell you what makes your heart right with God, and that gives hope. I will say that a “tack on” is better than none at all. Yet Clowney’s “tack-on” was strategic. He wanted to lead us to where the impact would be the greatest. If your “tack-on” is the method of preaching the Law and then giving the altar call at the end, then there is nothing in the text that gives you the basis for doing that. It is certainly a danger to do the “tack-on” unless you are showing something in the text or context that allows you to point to the culmination of the grace principles. That is the more difficult thing. Yet it is the glory of Gospel eyes. You will hear it soon. If you hear a sermon this week that is nothing but the “deadly be’s,” you will automatically know it. You will not walk away from a purely moralistic sermon and not recognize it for what it is. The hard part is correcting it. How do you see the grace that is there?

How often do you answer the questions “why” and “how?” If I have spent all of this time developing these truths, then I will want to develop “what” and “where” in virtually every main point. The “why” and “how” must be done somewhere before the sermon ends. They are less specific in terms of where they occur. Before the people walk away, you want to make sure you have done the four questions. They may be early, late, or woven through the message. The FCF often gives you insight to how you will be doing the “why” and the “how.” You can say it 10,000 ways, but the “why” is almost always responsive love to the grace of God. How many ways can you describe love? Poets have done it for thousands of years. So the “why” is always the love of God. The “how” is more difficult. You are saying to people, “Here are practical means. Here is information. Here are practices that will help you do it.” Ultimately, even the how is out of a greater love for Christ. That is why the “why” cannot be forgotten. Most of this course is about the “why.” You already have the “what” and “where” in mind, so much of this course is making sure the “why” comes into view.

Questions about time management are common. If you are going to preach Genesis to Revelation every Sunday, then it is going to get long. An old preacher’s rule is that a long main point should be the first one. You want to accelerate for attention and impact. If you are going to do the redemptive truth at the end, then it must carry the whole freight of that main point. So if the redemptive truth is the third main point, then that will be all you will say in the third main point. If it is foundational and interwoven through the message, then your time management is not different than for any other factor. If it is not in view until the third main point, however, then you know it must be the main thing said, because you do not have time in the acceleration process to say much more.

Another time management tip has to do with the wording of main points. You may have three main points: we must obey God, we must honor God, and we must trust God. All the emphasis is on what we must do. That makes it more difficult to interweave redemptive truths. If the truth principles are what God has done—God redeems His people, or God forgives the unforgivable—if some grace principle is the wording of the main point, then even your wording is carrying much of the exegetical weight. You are proving that truth. Then your application is an implication of that truth. It is a natural unfolding of the truth that you have done. Stating your main points as grace principles or redemptive truths carries much time help for you.