

Philosophy and Methodology of Expository Preaching
Central Africa Baptist College

Dr. David M. Doran
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Defending and Defining Expository Preaching

I. The Defense of Expository Preaching

A. A Theological Principle, Hebrews 1:1-2

- “Preaching is indispensable to Christianity. Without preaching a necessary part of its authenticity has been lost. For Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God. No attempt to understand Christianity can succeed which overlooks or denies the truth that the living God has taken the initiative to reveal himself savingly to fallen humanity; or that his self-revelation has been given by the most straightforward means of communication known to us, namely by a word and words; or that he calls upon those who have heard his Word to speak it to others” (John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 15).

B. A Biblical Practice

- The Scriptures preserve a special place for the task of preaching, cf. Acts 5:42; 6:2-4; 0:42; Rom 10:14-17; 1 Cor 1:17-2:5; 9:16; Phil 1:12-18; 2 Tim 4:1-5.
- The pastor is especially called to fulfill this task, cf. Titus 1:9; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17.

C. A Messianic Pattern

- The Lord counted preaching as central to His mission, cf. Isa 61:1-2; Mark 1:38; Luke 4:43; John 17:6.

D. A Profitable Method

- It is God’s chosen means for saving souls, Rom 10:14-17; 1 Cor 1:23-24.
- It is a form which provides great advantages:
 1. It enables a sustained effort to reach the mind and affections;
 2. It provides an opportunity for sustained arguments to be marshaled;
 3. It allows one to cultivate an exalted view of majestic truths; and
 4. It can handle pointed confrontation more effectively.

- Systematic exposition of biblical passages should be our primary method because:
 1. It is the method least likely to stray from the text;
 2. When done well, it teaches people how to read and study their Bibles;
 3. It brings certainty and authority into the preacher;
 4. If done properly, it meets the need for relevance without surrendering to the clamor for relevance;
 5. It enables the pastor to address tough issues in the course of exposition;
 6. It yields a systematic proclamation of the whole counsel of God.

E. A Divine Encounter

- God makes Himself known, 1 Cor 14:25
- Christ's voice is heard, John 10:16; cf. Luke 10:16; Matt 10:40; John 13:20; Gal 4:12-13.
- God's glory is seen in the knowledge of Christ, 2 Cor 4:4,6; cf. 5:20

II. The Definition of Expositional Preaching

A. The Meaning of Expositional Preaching

1. It is not:
 - a. Determined by the length of the passage.
 - b. A running commentary on the passage.
 - c. A doctrinal or topical approach to every idea in the passage.
2. It is a method of preaching which
 - a. unfolds the original meaning of a biblical passage(s),
 - b. integrates it with the unified message of Scripture, and
 - c. makes appropriate application to its contemporary hearers.

“Expository preaching, therefore, emerges not merely as a type of sermon—one among many—but as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration. Expository preaching then originates as a philosophy rather than a method. It reflects a preacher’s honest effort to submit his thought to the Bible rather than to subject the Bible to his thought” (Haddon Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], pp. 69-70).

Others have defined it well—

Merrill Unger (*Principles of Expository Preaching*, p. 33):

Expository preaching is a "*manner of treatment*. No matter what the length of the portion explained may be, if it is handled in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of a particular Biblical writer and as it existed in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers, it may properly be said to be expository preaching."

Sidney Greidanus (*The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, p. 11):

"Thus one might say that expository preaching is preaching biblically. But 'expository preaching' is more than a mere synonym for biblical preaching; it describes what is involved in biblical preaching, namely the exposition of a biblical passage (or passages)."

John Stott (*Between Two Worlds*, 126):

"The size of the text is immaterial, so long as it is biblical. What matters is what we do with it. Whether long or short, our responsibility as expositors is to open it up in such a way that it speaks its message clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly, without addition, subtraction or falsification. In expository preaching the biblical text is neither a conventional introduction to a sermon on a largely different theme, nor a convenient peg on which to hang a ragbag of miscellaneous thoughts, but a master that dictates and controls what is said."

Haddon Robinson (*Biblical Preaching*, p. 20):

"Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers."

Walter Liefeld (*New Testament Exposition*, p. 6):

"The essential nature of expository preaching, then, is preaching that explains a passage in such a way as to lead the congregation to a true and practical application of that passage."

B. The Marks of Expositional Preaching

1. The Sermon's Theme

"If God superintended the writing of Scripture and protected its details, the biblical preaching must reflect God's thought both in theme and development" (Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], pp. 75-76).

2. The Sermon's Structure

"Not only are the Bible's words God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), but so also are the relationships of those words to one another. Therefore, the preacher committed to handling the Word of Truth accurately (2 Tim. 2:15) must be willing to expend considerable effort studying syntactical (i.e., pertaining to the interrelationships of words, phrases, clauses, etc.) as well as semantical (i.e., pertaining to words and their contextual meanings) dimensions of the biblical text" (George J. Zemek, "Grammatical Analysis and Expository Preaching" in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, pp. 154-155).

3. The Sermon's Content

"In the study, the expositor examines the grammar, history, and context of the passage. In the pulpit, the preacher must deal with enough of the language, background, and setting of the text so that an attentive listener is able to check the message from the Bible" (Haddon Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], p. 65).

"Only preachers committed to proclaiming what God says have the Bible's imprimatur on their preaching. Thus, expository preaching endeavors to discover and convey the precise meaning of the Word. Scripture rules over what expositors preach because they unfold what it says. *The meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon*. The text governs the preacher. Expository preachers do not expect others to honor their opinions. Such ministers adhere to Scripture's truths and expect their listeners to heed the same" (Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, p. 23).

4. The Sermon's Purpose

"Determining a sermon's subject remains only half-done when the preacher has discerned what the biblical writer was saying. We do not fully understand the subject until we have also determined its reason or cause.... Until we have determined a passage's purpose, we should not think we are ready to preach its truths.... We must determine the purpose of a passage before we really know the subject of our sermon." (Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, pp. 40-41).

C. The Measurements of Expository Preaching

1. Comparing the homiletical and exegetical statements of theme.

"The theme of the sermons should develop from the thought of the Bible. While this sounds like keen insight into the obvious, it is observed more often in the breach than in the keeping. Every Sunday ministers claiming high regard for the Scriptures preach on texts whose ideas they either do not understand or have not bothered to study" (Haddon Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], p. 71).

"What is slander? Well, one form of it is reporting that a man has said something that he did not say. And why is not the Bible slandered when some inaccurate and unexegetical fumbler spends hours every week in public discourses on what the Bible says? So then, our very veracity forces us to philology, to exegesis, to profound interpretation. If we intentionally misrepresent meanings, we are liars, plain as day. But if we misrepresent meanings through carelessness, or through laziness, it shows that we have in us the making of a liar. We are willing to make statement after statement that we have never taken the trouble to verify." (Nathaniel J. Burton quoted in Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], p. 74).

2. Examining the breakdown and labeling of the divisions of the sermon.

"Biblical preaching should not only be true to the Bible in its central ideas but in the development of those ideas as well. Many sermons that begin in the Bible stray from it in their structures. Homiletical methods sometimes tempt the minister to impose an arrangement of thought on a text foreign to that of the inspired writer. The shoe must not tell the foot how to grow. To be truly biblical, the major assertions supporting the sermon's basic concept must also be taken from the passage on which it is based." (Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], p. 75).

“If God superintended the writing of Scripture and protected its details, the biblical preaching must reflect God’s thought both in theme and development” (Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], pp. 75-76).

3. Considering the relation between the purpose of the text and the purpose of the sermon.

“While the idea of the sermon is the truth to be presented, the purpose describes what the truth is intended to accomplish. A statement of purpose recognizes that truth exists not as an end in itself but as an instrument through which men and women establish a relationship with God and one another. A biblical sermon finds its purpose not merely in a study of the audience but primarily through exegesis and hermeneutics. Behind every section of the sacred writings lies the reason why the author included the material... Preachers who honor the Bible will align the purposes of their sermons with the aims of the biblical writer” (Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], p. 76).

4. Evaluation of the amount of time spent “in” the passage, not just “around” or “about” it.

Just as there is a tendency today to take the glory of God for granted and to keep it in the basement as the assumed foundation for other topics, in the same way there is a similar tendency to hide the actual wording of the biblical text as the unseen foundation of the sermon. There seems to exist the idea that to tell people to look with you at the words and phrases of the text as you make your points is academic or pedantic—that it smacks of school and lectures which have boring connotations and so don’t hold the attention or stir affections, let alone assist worship.

I want to plead otherwise. Our people need to see that what we say about God comes from the Word of God. We should not ask them to take our word for it. We should show it. Our aim is to show the glories of Christ with the authority of God’s words, not ours. Our ideas about the glories of Christ are of no great importance. What matters is what God says about the glory of God. And it matters that the people see that it is God who says it and not us. And showing them the very words and phrases and clauses that display the glory of Christ does not have to be pedantic or boring. I am pleading not merely that what you show of Christ really be from the text, but that you demonstrate to your people that it is from the text, that you deflect the authority away from yourself to the text, and that you enable them to see it and hold it from the text for themselves. (John Piper, “Preaching As Worship” *TrinJ* 16:1 [Spring 1995] 39)

5. Watching to see if people are using (needing?) their Bibles to “stick” with the sermon.

“When preachers announce a text they sometimes practice sleight of mind—now you see it, now you don’t. The passage and the sermon may be nothing more than strangers passing in the pulpit” (Haddon Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], p. 70).

“expository preaching is more a philosophy than a method. It is the answer to the basic question: ‘Does the preacher subject his thought to the Scriptures, or does he subject the Scriptures to his thought?’ Is the passage used like the national anthem at a football game—it gets things started but then is not heard again? Or is the text the essence of the sermon to be exposed to the people?” (Haddon Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], pp.

Preaching with Authority

Foundational Texts:

- Matthew 7:28-29
- Titus 2:15

I. The Importance of Preaching with Authority

A. The Rebellion of the Age

“Seldom if ever in its long history has the world witnessed such a self-conscious revolt against authority. Not that the phenomenon of protest and rebellion is new. Ever since the fall of man human nature has been rebellious, ‘hostile to God’ and unwilling, even unable, to ‘submit to God’s law’ (Rom. 8:7). And this basic fact about the human condition has had a thousand ugly manifestations. What seems new today, however, is both the world-wide scale of the revolt and the philosophical arguments with which it is sometimes buttressed” (Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 51).

“And now, lastly, *why should we at this particular age be decided and bold?* We should be so because this age is a doubting age. It swarms with doubters as Egypt of old with frogs. You rub against them everywhere. Everybody is doubting everything, not merely in religion, but in politics and social economics, in everything indeed” (Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 228).

“Thus, minds cannot be organized and thoughts cannot be forced on people. No institution, however venerable, has the right to impose an idea upon us by the weight of its own authority. Nor even can any idea impose itself upon us all. For there is no such thing as a truth which is absolute and therefore universal. On the contrary, everything is relative and subjective. Before I can believe any idea, it has to authenticate itself to me personally; and before you can be expected to believe it, it must become self-authenticating to you. Until this happens, we neither should nor can believe” (Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 55-56).

B. The Retreat of the Modern Ministry Mindset

“Words like ‘ought,’ ‘should,’ and ‘must’ punctuated the older style in which the preacher told the audience what to do. The new style explains the issues, presents the alternatives, and then seeks to persuade—but clearly leaves the decision up to the listener. Modern Americans don’t want their politicians, doctors, or pastors telling them what to do. They want to be well informed and decide for themselves” (Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century*, p. 209).

“Speaching is not defined by the style of the presentation but by the relationship of the presenter to both the listeners and the content: the pastor uses a lecture-like format, often standing while the listeners are sitting. The speaker decides the content ahead of time, usually in a removed setting, and then offers it in such a way that the speaker is in control of the content, speed, and conclusion of the presentation” (Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined*, p. 22).

“Speaching stands in contrast to what I call *progressional dialogue*, where the content of the presentation is established in the context of a healthy relationship between the presenter and the listeners, and substantive changes in the content are then created as a result of this relationship.

It works like this: I say something that causes another person to think something she hadn’t thought before. In response she says something that causes a third person to make a comment he wouldn’t normally have made without the benefit of the second person’s statement. In turn I think something I wouldn’t have thought without hearing the comments made by the other two. So now we’ve all ended up in a place we couldn’t have come to without the input we received from each other. In a real way the conversation has progressed” (Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined*, pp. 23-24).

C. The Ramifications for True Gospel Ministry

1. The Gospel Message Calls for Decisiveness about Its Content and Importance
2. The Health of the Church Calls for Conviction regarding God's Truth

II. The Foundations of Preaching with Authority

A. A Biblical View of Truth

1. Rooted in the Existence of the Triune God, 1 Thessalonians 1:9; John 14:6, 17
2. Revealed in Scripture, John 17:17
3. Qualities:
 - a. Received via our minds
 - b. Expressed in verbal statements
 - c. Unified and coherent
 - d. Changeless

B. A Biblical View of Knowledge

1. We must start with the existence of God and the truthfulness of His Word.
2. Truth is knowable because:
 - a. God knows everything, 1 John 3:20
 - b. God has made us in His image, Gen 1:26-27; 1 Cor 11:7
 - c. God has given us an infallible standard, John 17:17

C. A Biblical View of Ministerial Stewardship, 1 Cor 4:2

“Indeed, if the metaphor teaches anything, it teaches that the preacher does not supply his own message; he is supplied with it. If the steward is not expected to feed the household out of his own pocket, the preacher is not to provide his own message by his own ingenuity” (Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, p. 23).

III. The Character of Preaching with Authority

A. Clarity

1. In Our Understanding of the Text (cf. 2 Tim 2:15)

“If a preacher knows his subject well, if he has mastered it, if he has become an authority on it, then he will speak confidently about it, even passionately. But if he is unsure of his subject or his field, he will speak hesitantly, perhaps reluctantly, and certainly not very authoritatively. There are times when we may bluff our way through a subject, but sooner or later the people will find out that we are simply a well-articulated windbag, with no real substance” (Montoya, *Preaching with Passion*, p. 83).

2. In Our Proclamation of the Text (cf. Col 4:4)

B. Conviction

1. In the Preacher—we are convinced that this is God’s truth (cf. 1 Thess 1:5).

“You cannot speak passionately or authoritatively about what you do not personally and wholeheartedly believe. Every truth found in Scripture needs to be filtered through our being until it takes root and yields faith” (Montoya, *Preaching with Passion*, p. 78).

2. In the Hearers—we aim to convince the hearers that this is God’s truth (cf. Titus 2:15).

C. Confrontation, 2 Timothy 4:2

“The preacher should never be apologetic, he should never give the impression that he is speaking by their leave as it were; he should not be tentatively putting forward certain suggestions and ideas. That is not to be his attitude at all. He is a man, who is there to ‘declare’ certain things; he is a man under commission and under authority. He is an ambassador, and he should be aware of his authority. He is an ambassador, and he should be aware of his authority. He should always know that he comes to the congregation as a sent messenger. Obviously, this is not a matter of self-confidence; that is always deplorable in a preacher.... You have no self-confidence, but you are a man under authority, and you have authority; and this should be evident and obvious” (Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, p. 83).

IV. The Cultivation of Preaching with Authority

A. We Must Be Convinced of the Truth

“It is part of wisdom, as well as of modesty, to give no small weight to the opinions of men whose abilities, learning, and piety have made them illustrious; but if a man is not accustomed to come for himself to the Bible, and form his own judgment of its meaning, his teachings, whatever else they may possess, will have little of living power to sway men’s souls” (Broadus, *Matthew*, p. 172).

B. We Must Be Conformed to the Truth

1. Honesty, Mark 12:14

¹⁴And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?"

2. Integrity, James 1:22

²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

"We must show our decision for the truth by the sacrifices we are ready to make. This is, indeed, the most efficient as well as the most trying method. We must be ready to give up anything and everything for the sake of the principles which we have espoused, and must be ready to offend our best supporters, to alienate our warmest friends, sooner than belie our consciences. We must be ready to be beggars in purse, and offscourings in reputation, rather than act treacherously. We can die, but we cannot deny the truth" (Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, p. 226).

C. We Must Be Competent with the Truth

1. Explanation

- a. Helping them see it in the text.
- b. Helping them understand the text.

2. Argumentation

- a. Anticipating the points of objection.
- b. Attacking the points of resistance.

The Mindset and Methodology of Expository Preaching

I. The Mindset of the Expository Preacher

Prior to public communication must be private investigation.

A. There are primarily two types of preachers.

Every preacher begins sermon preparation with one of two questions:

What can I <u>say</u> about this?	What does this <u>say</u> ?
Preoccupied with the <u>Preaching Moment</u>	Preoccupied with the <u>Preparation moment</u>
Concern: <u>Sermon/Audience</u>	Concern: <u>Text/Personal</u>
Attitude: <u>Anxiety</u>	Attitude: <u>Hunger</u>
Questions: Have I said it before? Is this interesting? Is there enough here?	Questions: What can I discover for myself? Do I know and understand this?
The work of <u>creation</u>	The work of <u>investigation</u>
<u>Making diamonds</u>	<u>Mining diamonds</u>

B. There are primarily two categories of study tools.

1. Tools designed for the purpose of Addition

2. Tools designed for the purpose of Extraction

II. The Methodology of An Expository Preacher

Concern	Passage					People		
Focus	Content			Meaning		Significance		
Purpose	Know			Understand		Apply		
Task	Survey	Condense	Expand	Dissect	Connect	Design	Develop	Deliver

A. Theme

1. Read and reread the text.
2. What is the eternal thematic truth communicated in this passage?

B. Developmental ideas

1. Summarize the main ideas into principle statements.
2. What are the divinely ordained developmental ideas which support this theme?

C. Structure

1. Deal with the grammar of the text.
2. What are the relationships which these ideas have to the theme and to each other?

D. Meaning

1. Examine the interpretive issues within the text.
2. What is the meaning of each significant word and phrase in this thematic unit?

E. Theology

1. Correlate this passage's truth with the overall message of Scripture.
2. How does this passage fit into the unified message of God's Word?

F. Outline

1. Construct a homiletical outline.
2. How should the sermon be structured in order to communicate the message of this passage to a contemporary audience?

G. Support Material

1. Submit the outline to the developmental questions.
2. What should be said in support of each point within the sermon outline?

H. Sermon

1. Prepare the sermon to be communicated to a specific audience.
2. How should the sermon be delivered so that the hearers are brought into transforming contact with the biblical message?

The preparation process could be visualized in this manner:

Stage	Activity	Goal
Survey	Read	Theme

Condense	Summarize	Developmental Ideas
Expand	Exegete	Structure
Dissect	Interpret	Meaning
Connect	Correlate	Theology
Design	Construct	Outline
Develop	Question	Support Material
Deliver	Target	Sermon

The Essence of Expository Preaching: Finding and Preaching the Textual Theme

I. Establishing the Hermeneutical and Homiletical Foundation

A. The Hermeneutical Foundation for Exposition of the Textual Theme.

1. Hermeneutics and Language

“Hermeneutics entails the principles of interpretation, the science and art. Exegesis refers to the application of those principles to the text in order to get the meaning. Hermeneutics supplies the tools to get the meaning; exegesis uses them...Hermeneutics is logically prior to exegesis” (McCune, “Biblical Hermeneutics”, p.16).

“The basic principles of interpretation come with the image of God that makes one a language-user. These principles are the so-called ‘received laws of language’ without which communication would be impossible...In hermeneutics man uses these received laws of language to come to the Bible in order to discover these laws and in order to refine them and use them in interpreting further the Scriptures.” (McCune, “Biblical Hermeneutics”, p.16).

2. Hermeneutics and God’s Revelation through Human Language

Since hermeneutics is built on laws of language rooted in the Creator and created order, Dr. Sam Dawson maintains that the interpreter should expect:

- a. God to use language grammatically (or normally)
- b. God to use language historically, i.e., as it was being used at the time given
- c. God to say what He means in the text and for that meaning to never change
- d. God to use language univocally
- e. God to use language truthfully
- f. God to use language harmoniously
- g. God to speak clearly

Therefore, the interpreter should expect to use a grammatical, historical, theological hermeneutic to get at the meaning of Scripture.

3. Hermeneutics, Human Language and the Textual Theme

“The smallest unit of discourse is the simple, grammatically complete, declarative sentence. Such a sentence constitutes by definition a single idea; it consists of something being predicated about something else. These smallest units we typically organize—at least when we are communicating effectively—into larger units such as paragraphs, sections, pericopes, or stanzas, depending on the genre of communication we have chosen. Moreover, each of these larger units—again, when we are organizing our thoughts most effectively—will have its own unifying idea. This is in fact what

renders them 'units.' In other words, it is precisely the presence of a central idea that provides each unit its 'unit-y,' its 'unit-ness,' so to speak" (Duane Litfin, "New Testament Challenges to Big Idea Preaching," in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, pp. 54-55).

"because God chose to communicate his inscripturated revelation in the form of ordinary human language, that communication of necessity will consist of organized units of discourse. Thus, to understand that revelation we must discern these units and discover the ideas they embody" (Litfin, p. 55).

On the basis of these facts, that interpretive analysis must always seek the answer to these two questions: (1) What is the text talking about (subject)? And (2) What is the text saying about the subject (complement)? (Keith Willhite, "A Bullet Versus Buckshot: What Makes the Big Idea Work?" in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, p. 17).

B. The Homiletical Foundation for Exposition of the Textual Theme.

1. The Content of the Sermon

"If God superintended the writing of Scripture and protected its details, the biblical preaching must reflect God's thought both in theme and development" (Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], pp. 75-76).

"Expository preaching, therefore, emerges not merely as a type of sermon—one among many—but as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration. Expository preaching then originates as a philosophy rather than a method. It reflects a preacher's honest effort to submit his thought to the Bible rather than to subject the Bible to his thought" (Haddon Robinson, *Making A Difference in Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], pp. 69-70).

Expositional preaching is a method of preaching which: (1) unfolds the original meaning of a biblical passage(s), (2) integrates it with the unified message of Scripture, and (3) makes appropriate application to its contemporary hearers.

2. The Communication of the Sermon

"If we are to communicate effectively with our audience, our own messages should also be the embodiment of a central idea" and "if that idea is to bear the authority of Heaven, it must be an idea 'derived from' and, ideally, 'transmitted through' the study of a biblical passage in its context" (Litfin, pp. 55-56).

Thus it follows that a faithful exposition of that passage will also display a central idea... The expositor's sermon constitutes a unit of discourse—that is, a more or less elaborate development of a single, significant idea—because it consists of an exposition of a biblical unit of discourse" (Litfin, p. 56).

II. Applying Hermeneutics to Homiletics: Finding and Preaching the Theme

Goal: Identify the eternal thematic truth presented in this self-contained unit of Scripture.

A. Learn the background of the passage.

1. Who wrote it?
2. Who received it?
3. When was it written?
4. Why was it written?
 - a. What prompted it?
 - b. What is its purpose?
5. What type of literature is it?

B. Limit the passage to a thematic unit.

1. The Principle

The preaching text should be a self-contained unit of thought. The preacher must determine the length of passage and number of subordinate ideas to address, but the guiding concern is to honor the integrity of the text's content.

2. The Process

- a. The two qualities are distinctiveness and coherency:
 - Can this unit be distinguished from the ones before and after it?
 - Do all the parts of this unit fit together? Is there a coherent idea?
- b. Common sense is your greatest ally, i.e., is there a natural beginning and ending to the thought? Force yourself to provide even the obvious answers to why the text stands as a distinct unit of thought.
- c. Check the original text and several translations.
- d. Be suspicious of the chapter and verse divisions.

C. Find the eternal thematic truth.

1. The Principle

Every passage/unit of logical communication, oral or written, has one major idea being presented and everything within that unit is a development of that idea.

2. The Process

- a. Identify the Author's Key Terms.

- 1) Repetition
 - 2) Placement
 - 3) Distinctiveness
 - 4) Theological significance
- b. Identify and Trace the Author's Argument.
- 1) The argument is built on its propositions
 - 2) The order in which it is developed
 - 3) The relation of the parts to one another
- c. Identify the Assertions and Imperatives.
- 1) Assertions answer an implied question.
 - 2) Imperatives help indicate the author's intention.

Theme Study Sheet

1. Is this a distinct and coherent unit?
2. Gathering Information
 - a. What are the repeated statements or thoughts?
 - b. Is there any direct statement of the central idea or purpose?
 - c. Are there any appeals or commands given?
3. Analyzing/Organizing the Information
 - a. What is the general topic of this unit?
 - b. What is the underlying question about the general topic that this passage is answering?
 - c. What is the passage saying about that topic? What is the assertion being made about the topic?

Proposed theme statement:

Cutting It Straight: The Exegetical Outline

Introduction—

1. A clarification about the process:
2. An overview of the process:

I. Condense

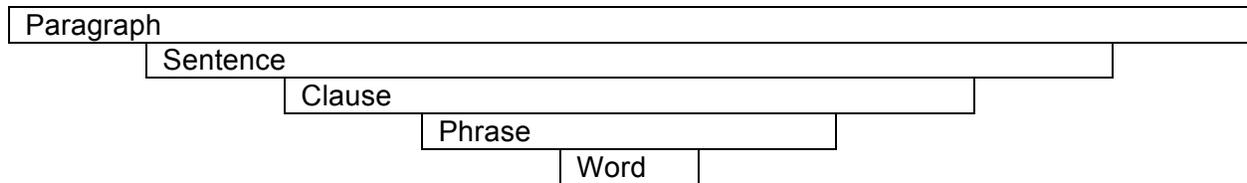
Goal: To determine the fixed number of developmental ideas contained in this unit (what does this paragraph say about the central idea?).

A. The Principle

Every unit of Scripture communicates a unified theme that is developed by a fixed number of subordinate ideas.

B. The Process

1. Break the unit into its logical chunks by observing the natural parts of composition (sentences, clauses, phrases, words).
 - a. Remember, meaning is communicated through the language. Alongside of "It can never mean what it never meant" must also be placed, "It can only mean what it says."
 - b. The more accurate our understanding of language (semantics and syntax), the better equipped we are to do exposition.



2. Identify the sentences, in a larger passage, or main clauses, within a smaller passage. (A main clause possesses a subject, predicate and object that can stand alone as a sentence.)
3. Summarize the content of the sentences or main clauses.

II. Expand

Goal: Explain the relationships of the elements of the passage to the main idea and to the developmental ideas.

A. The Principle

The meaning of Scripture is governed by authorial intent and this may only be determined by the author's selection and arrangement of words.

There are two basic components:

1. Clauses

A clause is a group of words which has a subject and a verb/predicate and which forms part of a sentence. Clauses may be classified according to (1) type and (2) grammatical function.

a. Types of Clauses

1) Independent, main or principal

Any clause that expresses a complete idea and can stand alone.

2) Coordinate

Any clause that forms one part of a compound sentence.

3) Dependent

Any clause which does not express a complete thought and cannot stand alone.

b. Functions of Clauses

1) Noun

2) Relative

3) Adverbial

2. Phrases

A phrase is a group of related words without a subject or predicate.

a. Prepositional

A group of words lacking a verb and introduced by a preposition.

b. Participial

A group of words introduced by a participle acting as an adjective.

- 1) Participles may be attributive, i.e., describing a substantive in some manner.
- 2) Participles may be predicative, i.e., making a statement about the subject of the sentence.
 - a) Complementary
 - b) Circumstantial

c. Infinitival

A group of words introduced by the word "to" and followed immediately by a verb.

- 1) Adverbial (modifying verbs and the like)
- 2) Adjectival (modifying nouns and the like)
- 3) Nominal (function as a noun)

B. The Process

1. Interrogate the text in order to specify the relationship that any dependent/subordinate clauses have to the independent/main clauses.
 - a. Detail the type and function of the clauses.
 - b. The key questions are: what, where, when, why, how, and who.
2. Identify the type and function of the phrases that make up the clauses.

C. The Product: Exegetical Outline

1. Definition

An arrangement of the content designed to visually communicate the organization of the text.

2. Characteristics
 - a. Each point is a summary or restatement of the text, i.e., it is designed for accuracy, not homiletics.
 - b. Detailed breakdown is the goal, i.e., every phrase should be represented.
 - c. Headings should reflect grammatical functions.

Interpreting the Text

Goal: To identify the precise meaning of the key words within the unit and answer any difficult interpretive questions.

To this point the quest has been to know the content of the text; the preacher may have the structure of the passage established, but the meaning of various terms and concepts needs to be clarified.

Three Common Interpretative Errors:

1. Making the text mean something which it does not say, i.e., failing to honor the grammatical principle of interpretation.
2. Making the text mean something which it never meant, i.e., failing to honor the historical principle of interpretation.
3. Making the text mean something which contradicts other Scripture, i.e., failing to honor the theological principle of interpretation.

I. The Principle

The meaning of the text is found in the words as used by the author in a precise arrangement.

II. The Process

A. Identify and define key words and phrase.

1. Identify the key words.
 - a. Which ones are theologically loaded?
 - b. Which ones are repeated in the context or serve as themes?
 - c. Which ones are unclear, unique, or unusual?
2. Study the context carefully.

This must be firmly in mind as you do research so that you are comparing apples with apples.

3. Determine the range of possible meaning for the term.
4. Study parallel uses of the term, i.e. how it is used in similar contexts.

B. Identify any questions raised by the text in regard to content, construction or conflicts.

1. Material which is difficult to understand.

2. Constructions which are difficult to specify proper relationships.
 3. Statements which seem to conflict with other texts.
- C. Note any historical, cultural matters which seem to affect the meaning and/or explanation of the text.

“All Scripture is Profitable...for Doctrine”

Goal: To tie the teaching of this text to the overall message and theology of Scripture.

I. The Principle

Each text conveys a portion of God's unified revelation and therefore contributes to the message of the whole and to the believer's understanding of God and His will.

II. The Process

A. Correlate the Biblical Themes

1. The Meaning

a. Wrong: Word chases through Scripture

b. Right: *Relating the passage being studied to other passages that provide theological information related to this text (particularly antecedent information).*

1) I.e., prior revelation which informs the meaning and significance of this text.

2) I.e., care must be exercised not to import theology into a text.

2. The Merits

a. It Acquaints People with the Word, i.e. it increases their familiarity with Scripture.

b. It Assures People about the Word, i.e. it increases their faith in the Scriptures.

3. The Method

a. Gather passages that deal with related biblical themes.

Organize them in a way which advances the biblical, theological, or practical point which you are making, i.e. *don't* just string verses together.

b. Unfold a biblical theme.

B. Surface the Theological Truths

1. The Meaning

a. Primarily: The *character* and *conduct* of God

b. Secondly: The categories of *theology*.

2. The Methods

a. A Simple Question: What does this teach us about God? Christ?

b. A Simple Technique: Check the Scripture Index of a Theology

1) Look for valuable contributions to your understanding of the particular text(s); and,

2) Identify theological meat that you can include in your sermonic meal.

Designing Sermons for Effective Communication

I. The Principles

A. Regarding Preaching

1. Its Elements

“Preaching is the communication of divine truth through human personality to human personality for the building up of God’s people to the glory of God” (Warren Wiersbe, *The Dynamics of Preaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999], p. 16).

(1) The Text

(2) The Preacher

(3) The Congregation

2. Its Objectives, 2 Timothy 3:16

B. Regarding Oral Communication

1. The Nature of the Communication

The distinct differences between oral and written communication make it necessary for the speaker to put extra effort into clarity. Written communication has built-in devices and advantages to aid clarity. What are some of them?

2. The Needs of the Congregation

- a. The listeners have hopefully not worked *as long on understanding the text as you have*.
- b. The listener does not have a *visual outline to follow (unless you give him one)*.

II. The Process

A. Recognize the difference between textual and sermonic outlines.

1. The textual outline is how the biblical writer communicated his message.
2. The sermonic outline is how you plan to communicate the biblical idea.

- B. Base the organization of the sermon around the textual theme.
1. Every unit of logical communication communicates a single idea.
 2. That unit is comprised of a topic (what it is about) and assertion (what it is saying about the subject).
 3. The sermon should focus on a timeless, relevant expression of the biblical idea contained in that unit of Scripture.
 - a. Exegetical statement
 - b. Principle statement
 - c. Homiletical statement
- C. Determine the primary thrust of the sermon.
1. Explanation
 2. Argumentation
 3. Application
- D. Build the structure of the sermon around the placement of the theme and its contemporary relevance within the biblical flow of thought.
1. Placement of the theme.
 - a. Front-end or delayed.
 - i. Common descriptors are deductive vs. inductive approach, but I don't think those are best simply because those words don't what they're being used to describe.
 - ii. Front-end placement of the theme means... *that you state the theme before you handle the text. Basically, it comes in your introduction as a full, complete idea (subject and complement; topic and assertion).*
 - iii. Delayed placement of the theme means... *you wait until you have developed the idea through the exposition of the text, i.e., you lead people to the formation of the full, complete idea. Generally, the introduction would raise the subject or introduce the topic, then your main points would fill in the details about the subject/topic (give the complement, make the assertion).*

- b. Front-end works best if... *it contains enough interest or question that can sustain the listener's attention.*
- c. Delayed works best if... *you need to develop it from the text in order for it to make sense, keep interest, etc.*

2. Placement of the contemporary relevance.

- a. Relevancy at the end.
 - i. Brief introduction—explain entire passage—contemporary application
 - ii. When might we do this?
- b. Relevancy interspersed.
 - i. Introduction—unfold one part of text—contemporary application—next part of text—contemporary application...
 - ii. When might we do this?
- c. Relevancy wrapped.
 - i. Introduction explores contemporary application—unfold first part of biblical passage—unfold second part of biblical passage—contemporary application

Here's what's going on in our lives.
The same thing was going on in the biblical world.
Here's how they handled it.
Here's how we should handle it.
 - ii. When might we do this?

Putting Muscle into the Sermon Body: The Developmental Questions

Goal: To develop the content of the sermon so that the audience knows, believes and applies the message of the text to their lives.

I. The Principle

The preacher's task is to communicate the meaning and significance of a text for the purpose of bringing the hearers under its authority.

- A. This means that each preaching occasion must be evaluated in light of the text and audience.
- B. The determination of the sermon's purpose dictates the emphasis of the sermon in the balance of meaning (instruction) and significance (implications).

II. The Process

There are only three things you can do with any idea: explain it, prove it, or apply it. The content of the sermon is generated by submitting each portion of the outline to the three basic developmental questions: (1) What Do I Need to Explain? (2) Is It True? Do We Buy It? (3) Where Does It Show Up in Life?

A. Explanation: What Do I Need to Explain?

1. The Demand

Several reasons which call for explanation in preaching:

- a. The CHARACTER of God's revelation, i.e. it is propositional, therefore those propositions must be studied and declared (2 Tim 2:15).
- b. The COMPREHENSION of man, i.e. man is a rational creature created in the image of God, therefore he must be addressed from the basis of revealed truth that is accurately exegeted and explicated.
- c. The CONTENT of faith, i.e. faith is the knowledge of, assent to, and unre-served trust in the revelation of God, therefore we must supply the content that is the object of their faith (Rom 10:17).
- d. The CATALYST of spiritual growth, i.e. believers grow through knowledge of God and His Word, therefore it must be taught so that they acquire the necessary food for growth (Col 3:10; 2 Pet 3:18).

2. The Dangers

- a. A Misunderstood Purpose: Preacher as Reporter

A. W. Tozer stated it this way, "There is scarcely anything so dull and meaningless as Bible doctrine taught for its own sake. Truth divorced from life is not truth in the Biblical sense, but something else and something less.... The purpose behind all doctrine is to secure moral action" (*Of God and Men*, pp. 26-27).

b. A Mistaken Practice: Information Overload

- 1) Define key terms, not all terms.
- 2) Relate the text to its far and near contexts.
- 3) Point out assumptions made by the writer that the original readers may have held.
- 4) Seek to summarize the truth that is being taught.

B. ARGUMENTATION: Is It True? Do We Buy It?

1. Logical

a. The Meaning

Sometimes we don't buy it because we do not see the connection. People may see "A" and "B" but they do not act on them because they do not see any relationship between them.

b. The Method

There are three ways to accomplish this:

- 1) Point out the exegetical connections, i.e. how these truths relate in the text.
- 2) Point out the theological connections, i.e. how this truth relates to the rest of Scriptural truth.
- 3) Point out the practical connections, i.e. how this truth relates to life.

2. Practical

a. The Meaning

Sometimes we don't buy it because it seems contrary to real life. We really don't believe the statement.

b. The Method

- 1) Identify the hidden objections or unspoken obstacles.
- 2) Make clear the distinction between apparent and real contradictions.
- 3) Establish the ultimate truth or reality behind the biblical statement. Help the listener to really believe it.

3. Volitional

a. The Meaning

Sometimes we do buy it, but we buy something else more. We all operate with a hierarchy of competing values. Our job is to identify the competing values and address this conflict.

b. The Method

- 1) Identify the areas of conflict in accepting this truth, i.e. what causes people to violate or ignore this truth?
- 2) Surface the competing beliefs or attitudes so that the listener can feel their full force.
- 3) Demonstrate why acting on the biblical principle is more beneficial than holding to their present belief or attitude.

C. APPLICATION: Where Does It Show Up in Life?

1. The Principles of Effective Sermon Application

- Application is the responsibility of the preacher.
- Application must flow out of the original intent of the passage.
- Application must build from clear explanation.
- Application is the goal of sermon construction.
- Application must engage the preacher first, then the people.

Calvin said, "It would be better for the preacher to break his neck going up into the pulpit if he is not going to be the first to follow God."

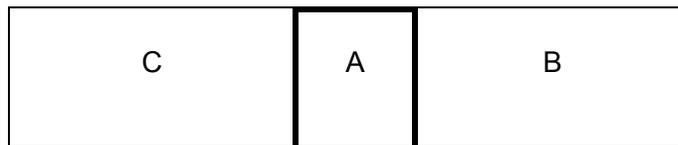
2. The Procedure for Effective Sermon Application

- Instruction: What does God require of me?
- Situation: Where does God require it of me?

- Motivation: Why must I do what God requires of me?
- Commission: How can I do what God requires?
 - ✓ We must point out the practical steps for application.
 - ✓ We must direct them to their spiritual resources in application.

Use illustrations which apply the concept, not ones that simply clarify it. An illustration *clarifies* when it is an *analogy* from another area of life. An illustration *applies* when it is the *exact* thing the biblical author is talking about.

The best illustrations come from the shared experiences of both speaker and listeners.



D

A = an illustration from the experience of both the speaker and the listener(s)

B = an illustration from the experience of the listener(s)

C = an illustration from the experience of the speaker

D = an illustration from the experience of neither

INTRODUCTIONS, TRANSITIONS, & CONCLUSIONS

I. Starting Well—

A. The Purpose of Introductions

1. To capture the attention the listeners.
2. To build rapport with the listeners.
3. To show the listeners why they should listen.
4. To orient the listeners to the message.

B. The Pattern for Introductions

1. Interest

This is gained (or lost) in the first few sentences of the sermon. The listeners should conclude, "This *speaker* is worth listening to."

2. Involvement

This is gained (or lost) in the first few paragraphs of the sermon. The listeners should conclude, "This *sermon* is worth listening to." This is achieved by surfacing a need or arousing curiosity.

3. Information

Once attention and rapport have been established and the need for the message has been made clear, the introduction must prepare the listener's mind for reception of the message.

a. Context

We must strive to bring the listener in contact with the biblical text and context (without mentioning book, chapter, or verse) which addresses the needs which have been surfaced.

b. Focus

The crisp statement of the Main Idea (if front-end loaded) or the Topic (if delayed). The Main Idea should be restated clearly in order to mark its importance.

c. Preview

This is a presentation of how the message will develop and unfold. It tells the listener how to listen to the message—it is the road map of what is ahead.

d. Passage

The last step of the introduction is the reading of the text.

C. The Preparation of Introductions

1. Gaining Active Interest

- a. Purpose—will it capture attention?
- b. Precision—lean, concise; don't ramble.
- c. Proper—avoid sensationalism.
- d. Pertinent—make sure it is connected to the main idea.

2. Securing Personal Involvement

- a. Make an Assessment of the Audience
 - 1) Their attitude toward the messenger.
 - 2) Their attitude toward the message.
- b. Make Application to the Needs of the Audience
 - 1) Address genuine needs.
 - 2) Engage the particular audience at hand.
 - 3) Recognize the various groups in the audience.

II. Staying on Course—

A. The Purpose of Transitions

1. To keep the listeners involved in the sermon by making explicit the logical relationship between the main ideas.
2. To sustain the impact of the sermon theme by restating it and showing how each idea relates to it.
3. To prepare the listener for the next idea to be presented in the sermon.

B. The Form of Transitions

1. Additional transitions (shows one point building on another; “in addition...”)
2. Inferential transitions (wherefore, therefore)

3. Disjunctive transitions (contrast)
4. Dialogical transitions (questions)

III. Finishing Strong—

A. The Purpose of the Conclusion

1. To summarize the message (don't reproach it; encapsulate it—a quick, powerful summary).
2. To make the final exhortation.
3. To motivate the congregation (vivid, memorable—elevate style, careful comment or illustration).
4. To finish the sermon (land the plane!).

B. The Preparation of the Conclusion

1. Do not...
 - a. Introduce new material
 - b. Use tip-offs (in conclusion; closing your Bible; putting notes away)
 - c. Go too long
 - d. Let your energy drop
 - e. Become predictable
2. Do...
 - a. Work on clarity and precision
 - b. Return to purposes and needs in introduction
 - c. Make it vivid
 - d. Build to a climax (not necessarily volume)

Not in Word Only: Spirit-Empowered Preaching
1 Thessalonians 1:5

1. Preachers must grasp the seriousness of our task and its eternal significance within the plan of God, 1 Cor 1:18-25; 1 Tim 4:16; 1 Pet 1:12.

“We may add, that so powerful is the influence of the Pulpit upon the Church, that the general state of the Church at any given period may be correctly estimated by the prevalent style of preaching” (Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, p. 190).

2. Preachers must understand the nature of preaching so that they engage in it properly, 1 Pet 4:10-11.

“All Christian preaching should be the exposition and application of biblical texts. Our authority as preachers sent by God rises and falls with our manifest allegiance to the text of Scripture. I say ‘manifest’ because there are so many preachers who say they are doing exposition when they do not ground their assertions explicitly—‘manifestly’—in the text” (Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 41).

“Preaching, to them, was not so much searching out new truth (however new the truth they told might be to some listeners) as making vivid old truth in its relevance for living. Preaching, to them, was God-taught information set forth with God-given freedom and forthrightness is a God-prompted application...—human communications through which God himself communicates” (Packer, *Truth & Power*, p. 159).

3. Preachers must give preaching its rightful place of prominence in their ministry, namely that they work hard at it and give themselves diligently to the task, 1 Tim 4:14-16; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:15.

“We shall never perform a more important task than preaching. If we are not willing to give time to sermon preparation, we are not fit to preach, and have no business in the ministry at all” (Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, p. 282).

4. Preachers must consciously and continually acknowledge their need for the Spirit’s empowering work, 2 Cor 2:16-17; 3:5-6.

“How utterly dependent we are on the Holy Spirit in the work of preaching! All genuine preaching is rooted in a feeling of desperation” (John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, p. 37).

“*The use of means* honors the work of the Spirit. But *dependence upon the means* obscures his glory, and therefore issues in unprofitableness” (Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, 177).

5. Preachers must live in light of their dependence—it is foolish to walk contrary to the Word and then presume to have the Spirit’s empowering when they minister it, 1 Ths 5:19; Eph 4:30; Gal 5:25; cf. 2 Tim 2:21; 2 Cor 6:16-7:1.

“The principle is this: that unless we would degrade preaching to a mere elocutionary art, we must never forget that *the soil out of which powerful preaching grows is the preacher’s own life....* It has been said, ‘A minister’s life is the life of his ministry.’ If preaching is the communication of truth through a human instrument, then the particular truth thus communicated is either augmented or reduced in its effect by the life through which it comes” (Martin, *What’s Wrong with Preaching Today?*, pp. 5-6).

6. Preachers must value God's power more than they value their lives, 2 Cor 12:7-10; cf. 4:7-15.

"If human weakness is the channel through which God most readily communicates His power, Paul was prepared not only to affirm his weakness, but to revel in it" (Azurdia, *Spirit-Empowered Preaching*, p. 144).

7. Preachers must recognize the given-ness of this assistance—it is a gift, not something at their command, cf. Eph 6:19 "that utterance may be given to me."

"The passive 'may be given' indicates that this 'word' will be graciously provided by God (hence the petition is addressed to him), while the term here means 'utterance', that is, the right word for him to speak when he opens his mouth to declare the mystery of the gospel" (O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, p. 487).

8. Preachers must seek God for this gracious empowering, Acts 4:29, 31; Luke 11:13.

"Instead of seeing that verse as a reference to one experience they regarded it as a promise for the believer's whole life. Luke 11:13 warrants continuing prayer for the Holy Spirit. 'This is the daily work of believers,' writes Owen. 'If, therefore, our life to God, or joy of that life, be considerable [i.e., large], in this we are to be abound,—to ask him of the Father, as children do of their parents daily bread.'" (Murray, *Pentecost—Today?*, 120-121)

"All Christians are to pray for the Holy Spirit. We are to seek more of his grace and power than we presently know. 'It becomes us,' wrote Calvin, 'to be instant in prayer, and to beg at God's hands that he will increase in us his Holy Spirit: increase, I say, because before we can conceive any prayer we must needs have the first-fruits of the Spirit'" (Murray, *Pentecost—Today?*, 130-131).

9. Preachers must urge those around them to seek God on their behalf for the Spirit's work through their ministry of the Word, Eph 6:18-20; 2 Ths 3:1.

Spurgeon—"The sinew of the minister's strength under God is the supplication of his church. We can do anything and everything if we have a praying people around us. But when our dear friends and fellow helpers cease to pray, the Holy [Spirit] hastens to depart, and Ichabod is written on the place of assembly."

Gardiner Spring—

- "Let the thought sink deep into the heart of every church, that their minister will be very much such a minister as their prayers may make him. If nothing short of Omnipotent grace can make a Christian, nothing less than this can make a faithful and successful minister of the Gospel."
- "O it is at fearful expense that ministers are ever allowed to enter the pulpit without being preceded, accompanied, and followed by the earnest prayers of the churches. It is no marvel that the pulpit is so powerless, and ministers are so often disheartened when there are so few to hold up their hands."

10. Preachers must preach in faith that God will work to glorify Himself through the Word powerfully applied by the Spirit, 2 Cor 3:12; cf. 4:13.

“Expect great things; attempt great things.’ This expectation is the life of faith—the vitality of the ministry—that which honors God, and is honored by God. All our failures may be ultimately traced to a defect of faith. We ask but for little, we expect but little, we are satisfied with little; and therefore we gain and do but little.” (Bridges, *The Christian Ministry*, pp. 173-174).

Sermon Design Examples from Romans 16:17-18

Romans 16:17-18 ¹⁷I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.

¹⁸For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

Structural Flow:

¹⁷I appeal to you, brothers,
to watch out for those
who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you
have been taught;
avoid them.

¹⁸For
such persons
do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites,
and by smooth talk and flattery
they deceive the hearts of the naive.

Textual Outline:

- I. The responsibilities of God's people regarding false teachers.
 - A. Believers are to identify those who teach contrary to what they had learned.
 1. People who cause divisions.
 2. People who cause offenses.
 - B. Believers are to avoid these kinds of teachers.
- II. The reasons for responding to false teachers like this.
 - A. They do not serve Jesus Christ, but their own appetites.
 - B. They deceive the hearts of the simple by good words and fair speeches.

Homiletical Outline:

- I. The commands regarding false teachers
 - A. We must identify them
 - B. We must turn away from them
- II. The characteristics of false teachers
 - A. They separate people from apostolic truth
 - B. They serve their selfish appetites
 - C. They operate by deception

Theme:

The Apostle Paul wanted the believers at Rome to identify and turn away from teachers who cause divisions among God's people and serious spiritual problems in God's people by using deceptive words to advance their selfish purposes.

God's Word urges us to identify and avoid false teachers because of their dangerous doctrine and deceptive methods.

Placement of the Theme:

Front-end: The proper response by God's people to false teachers is to identify and avoid them because their doctrine is dangerous and the methods are deceptive.

- I. Our responsibilities regarding false teachers
- II. The reasons for responding like this

Delayed:

Intro—The spiritual threat posed by false teachers is real, so God urges His people to respond properly to them. What is the proper biblical response to false teachers?

- I. We can see how God wants us to respond in the commands He gives us.
 - A. We are to identify them.
 - B. We are to avoid them.
- II. We can see why God commands these things by seeing how He describes them and their teaching.
 - A. They separate people from apostolic truth
 - B. They serve their selfish appetites
 - C. They operate by deception

The proper response by God's people to false teachers is to identify and avoid them because their doctrine is dangerous and the methods are deceptive.

Placement of Relevancy:*Relevancy at the end:*

- I. The Situation at Rome
 - A. Commands regarding False Teachers
 1. We Must Identify Them
 2. We Must Avoid Them
 - B. Characteristics of False Teachers
 1. They separate people from apostolic truth
 2. They serve their selfish appetites
 3. They operate by deception
- II. The Situation in Our Day
 - A. How can we identify false teachers?
 - B. How do we turn away from them?

Relevancy interspersed:

- I. The Commands regarding False Teachers
 - A. We must identify them.
 - 1. What does this mean?
 - 2. How can we do this today?
 - B. We must avoid them.
 - 1. What does this mean?
 - 2. How do we do this today?
- II. The Characteristics of False Teachers
 - A. They divide people from the apostolic doctrines,
 - 1. What does this mean?
 - 2. Where does this happen today?
 - B. They pursue selfish desires.
 - 1. What does this mean?
 - 2. What might this look like today?
 - C. They use deceptive methods.
 - 1. What does this mean?
 - 2. What are some examples of this today?

Relevancy wrapped:

- I. Our day is full of false teachers...
 - A. There are people who are denying gospel truth
 - B. There are people who are turning God's work into a money-making scam
 - C. There are people who use deceptive methods
- II. This was a problem in the early church as well
Paul exposed the roots problems with false teachers
 - A. They cause divisions and offences
 - B. They are motivated by selfish desires
 - C. They use deceptive methods
- III. God's answer for the early church was ...
 - A. They were to watch out for them
 - B. They were to avoid them
- IV. We must apply God's answer for them to our day...
 - A. We need to examine teaching carefully
 - B. We need to identify those who teach falsely
 - C. We need to separate from those who teach falsely (withhold or withdraw)

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation

Introduction:

1. In order to narrow our focus, let's start by considering the question, "Does the Holy Spirit Lead Interpreters to New Insights that Go Beyond the Historical-Grammatical Meaning?"
2. To be more precise, we must define what "grammatical-historical meaning" means.
3. For clarity's sake, we must define cognition and intuition.
 - Cognition may be defined as "the mental process or faculty by which knowledge is acquired" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, p. 259).
 - Intuition may be defined as "the act or faculty of knowing without the use of rational processes; immediate cognition" (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, p. 688).

I. Answering the Proposed Question

I would argue that the answer to this question is "No!"

- A. Divine inspiration of the Scriptures is verbal in character; therefore God's intended message comes to us by means of its words, 2 Tim. 3:16; Pro. 30:5-6.
- B. Biblical texts on illumination themselves reinforce the primacy of the biblical words as the key to understanding the Scriptures, 1 Cor. 2:6-16; 1 John 2:20-27; 2 Tim. 2:7; 2 Cor. 3:18.
- C. The Scriptures, through command and example, place authority of meaning in the biblical words and call us to diligent examination of them.
 1. The matter of our approval before God is dependent on our diligence in "rightly dividing the Word of truth", 2 Tim. 2:15.
 2. The Lord Jesus Christ establishes a clear pattern of grounding his affirmations in the explicit statements, i.e., the words, of Scripture.
 - But he said unto them, **Have ye not read** what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; Mat 12:3
 - Or **have ye not read** in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? Mat 12:5
 - And he answered and said unto them, **Have ye not read**, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, Mat 19:4
 - And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; **have ye never read**, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise? Mat 21:16
 - Jesus saith unto them, **Did ye never read in the scriptures**, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Mat 21:42
 - But as touching the resurrection of the dead, **have ye not read** that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, Mat 22:31

- And he said unto them, **Have ye never read** what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? Mark 2:25
 - And **have ye not read this scripture**; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: Mark 12:10
 - And as touching the dead, that they rise: **have ye not read in the book** of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? Mark 12:26
 - And Jesus answering them said, **Have ye not read** so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; Luke 6:3
3. The Apostle Paul was equally clear in directing believers to the words of Scripture, including what was written by him.
- Whereby, **when ye read**, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Eph 3:4
 - For we write none other things unto you, than **what ye read** or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end; 2 Cor 1:13
 - For whatsoever things **were written** aforetime **were written for our learning**, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Rom 15:4
 - Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and **they are written for our admonition**, upon whom the ends of the world are come. 1 Cor 10:11
 - For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? **For our sakes, no doubt, this is written**: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. 1 Cor. 9:9-10
 - And when this epistle is read among you, cause that **it be read** also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea. Col 4:16
 - I charge you by the Lord **that this epistle be read** unto all the holy brethren. 1 Th 5:27
 - And that from a child thou hast known **the holy scriptures** (NASB—sacred writings; *hiera grammata*), which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 2 Tim 3:15

II. Addressing the Resulting Question: What is the Spirit's role in interpretation?

A. True understanding of the Scriptures is impossible without the Spirit's work.

1. Depravity renders mankind incapable of true understanding of the Bible, 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 4:17-18.
2. The Spirit's work of enlightenment permanently changes the believer's ability to understand the Scriptures, 1 Cor. 2:15-16; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:18; Heb. 10:32.
3. The Spirit's work of enlightenment is a gift of grace bestowed upon the believer, not the operation of normal, human reason, Matt. 11:25; 16:18; 2 Cor. 4:6.

B. The need for the Spirit's work does not mean that the Scriptures are not clear in their meaning or that man is irrational.

1. The Bible's perspicuity is not to be called into question on the basis of man's inability. The texts cited above that call for examination of the words of Scripture are built on the presupposition that the Bible uses normal language normally.
 2. Natural man's inability to comprehend the true meaning of Scripture is owing to the depravity of his mind and will, 1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 4:17-18.
 - a. This is not to say that natural man cannot "know" anything of what the Bible says nor have any concept of its meaning. The Bible itself would indicate that the natural man can interact with the surface data of the Scriptures, e.g., Matt. 2:4-6.
 - b. This is to say that natural man cannot "understand" the significance of the Scriptures since he rejects (vs. welcomes) them and considers them foolishness, 1 Cor. 2:14. Because he is blind to their significance, he is blocked from understanding them correctly.
- C. The illuminating ministry of the Spirit is indirect and secondary, i.e., He works through the Word in combination with our exegetical efforts.
1. Defining the Spirit's work as indirect and secondary means that He uses instruments to accomplish His task, rather than directly and immediately impart information to the interpreter. The Spirit works through the Word and the efforts of the Bible student to provide understanding, cf. 2 Tim. 2:7,15; 3:15; 2 Pet. 3:16.
 2. A lack of effort or obedience on the part of a believer may negatively affect his ability to understand the truth of God, cf. Heb. 5:11-14; 1 Cor. 3:1-3.
 3. The only means of validating or affirming the Spirit's illumination is through a comparison of the proposed interpretation to the details of the biblical text, cf. Matt. 22:29-32.

Theme Identification Project: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

1. Is this a distinct and coherent unit?

2. Gathering Information

- a. What are the repeated statements or thoughts?

- b. Is there any direct statement of the central idea or purpose?

- c. Are there any appeals or commands given?

3. Analyzing/Organizing the Information

- a. What is the general topic of this unit?

- b. What is the underlying question about the general topic that this passage is answering?

- c. What is the passage saying about that topic? What is the assertion being made about the topic?

Proposed theme statement:

Theme Identification Project: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

1. Is this a distinct and coherent unit?

2. Gathering Information

- a. What are the repeated statements or thoughts?

- b. Is there any direct statement of the central idea or purpose?

- c. Are there any appeals or commands given?

3. Analyzing/Organizing the Information

- a. What is the general topic of this unit?

- b. What is the underlying question about the general topic that this passage is answering?

- c. What is the passage saying about that topic? What is the assertion being made about the topic?

Proposed theme statement:

Theme Identification Project: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

1. Is this a distinct and coherent unit?

2. Gathering Information

a. What are the repeated statements or thoughts?

b. Is there any direct statement of the central idea or purpose?

c. Are there any appeals or commands given?

3. Analyzing/Organizing the Information

a. What is the general topic of this unit?

b. What is the underlying question about the general topic that this passage is answering?

c. What is the passage saying about that topic? What is the assertion being made about the topic?

Proposed theme statement:

SAMPLE SERMONS:

The Foundation and Focus of Spiritual Life

Colossians 3:1-4

Introduction:

1. It seems like some new theory on how to live the Christian life is constantly being advertized and promoted. Someone has found the secret that everybody else missed for 2000 years! This really is an old problem—there were false teachers at Colossae who were trying to sell the believers some new ideas. The devil has no new tricks!
2. We have reached the halfway point of this letter, so let's do a quick review:
 - a. Theme—the way in is the way forward. Christ is the way in, so He is the way forward, “as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (2:6).
 - b. We have seen the glories of Christ, Paul's ministry and concern for them, the theme statement, and how it was negatively applied—don't get captured!
3. Paul transitions, beginning with 3:1, to drive home the central theme along more positive lines (though not without making negative points along the way). 3:1-4 lay the doctrinal and spiritual foundation and 3:5-4:1 focus on how this works out in our lives.
4. There are two commands in vv. 1-4: keep seeking (v. 1) and set your mind (v. 2). The rest of the text provides foundational and motivational truths that support these commands. They answer the why question—why should we seek and set?
5. Here's the central truth: *Because of our union with Christ, our lives should be focused above where He is.*

I. The Spiritual Realities of Being With Christ

A. Your Past Death with Christ, *for you have died.*

Since we have died to sin and this world, we ought to live for eternity! There is no true claim that sin can make on us—it is not our master any longer. The language of death is language of finality and termination. E.g., if we say “all hope has died,” we mean that there is no possibility of change, things are final. If someone treats another person as if he is dead, that means that the relationship has ended.

Our union with Christ makes His death our death, i.e., we died with Him. This death is the death of the old man/self, cf. Col 3:10-11, Rom 6:6, 2 Cor 5:17. It is a death that means the end of life as it was without Christ, and it is the basis for me considering myself to be dead to sin and alive to God (Col 3:5, Rom 6:11).

B. Your Present Life with Christ,

1. Resurrection Life with Christ, *you have been raised up with Christ (3:1)*

Paul uses a first class conditional clause to state the basis of this truth—their resurrection life with Christ. It is really, *since you have been raised or if then, and you have...* The primary focus is not ultimate resurrection; it is the current reality of resurrected life experienced by virtue of Christ's resurrection and through the new birth. We were dead in trespasses and sins, but now we are made alive!

Just as we died with Christ (2:20, 3:3), believers have participated in the resurrection of Christ via their union with Christ. The resurrection life of Christ is the source and strength of our spiritual life, cf. Eph 1:18-20, Rom 8:11-13. This resurrection life of Christ is communicated to us through the Spirit Who indwells us.

2. Hidden Life with Christ, *your life is hidden with Christ in God. (3:3)*

This unique description reveals to us the security and concealment of our spiritual life. The focus of the phrase “hidden with Christ” seems to be the spirituality (and therefore invisible-ness) of our new life. It is hidden in that Christ is in heaven and our life cannot be seen, cf. John 3:8, Col 2:20-23. Our life is so intricately joined to Christ's that Paul doesn't hesitate to say in v. 4 that Christ is our life.

Not only are we “hidden with Christ,” but we are with Christ “in God”—nothing can touch us there! We are hidden with Christ in God—we will not always be understood in this world because of the mystery of our salvation. We will not seem to be

exalted people, but we have God's promise of exaltation. We will seem, at times, to be despised and downtrodden by this world, but the day of victory will come!

Remember the conflict at Colossae—the false teachers were promoting an approach to spiritual security and fulfillment that focused on earthly things, cf. 2:8, 20. IOW, the key was found in your performance of certain rituals and conformity to their rules. Paul rejects that completely and points them to Christ as the anchor of our security and source of spiritual life.

C. Your Promised Glory with Christ, *you also will be revealed with Him in glory.*

The ultimate contrast is between the false promise of glory that this world offers and the genuine promise of glory when Christ returns. This reinforces the fact that we don't just long for a new location (heaven), but for a whole new realm—the kingdom of Christ. This is an eschatological reminder of our eternal destiny, cf. Phil 3:20-21, Rom 8:17.

Transition: Our union with Christ affects every aspect of our lives—past, present, and future—and also should affect the way we look at life. What are the ramifications of being with Christ?

II. The Ramifications of Being With Christ

A. The Orientation of Your Life, *keep seeking the things above*

The obligation to seek things above falls on everyone who has been made alive! If they have been raised with Christ, then they are under this command to seek things above. This blows away the modern trend to disconnect salvation from sanctification, as if they are totally separate issues. Sanctification (becoming holy and being freed from sin's power) is the inevitable responsibility and result of salvation (being declared holy and being freed from sin's penalty).

The verb is present tense which means a continual, habitual action. It is active, not passive; therefore, it is an obligation into which we must exert ourselves. It is the same exact word as Jesus used in Matthew 6:33! It speaks of the total orientation of our lives toward something. We invest our energy and wills in the pursuit of it. *The things above* is not to be understood exclusively as heaven, i.e., the phrase does mean *keeping seeking heaven*. The imagery Paul is developing is a contrast between this world and the world to come, or between the values of this world and the values of the world to come. In essence, Paul is telling them to orient their lives to the world that Jesus will usher in at His coming in glory, cf. v 4.

The connection that this has with our current behavior or ethical decisions is vital. I pursue what I place most value on. If this world (*the things below*) is higher in my value system, then I will live according to its "rules." If the kingdom of Christ which is coming is higher, then I will live according to His rules! The goal is to make the desires of your heart center on Christ and His coming kingdom. Since this is a command, that I believe it is safe to say that we do that (focus our hearts' desires) through the choices of our wills. I make a conscious choice to exalt God in my relationships, my stewardship, my worship & witness, etc.

The bottom-line is faith! Do I believe that the things above are of more value than the things below? Is the future promised by God more to be desired than the present facing me each day? 2 Cor 4:16 ties the renewal of our inner man to our faith in the promise of God regarding resurrection and future glory.

Paul quickly roots the command in the reality of Christ's exaltation to the right hand of the Father—a position of majesty, glory, and authority. His presence there is the defining issue for all mankind! He is there because He is exalted above all; He will return from there to be the Judge and Ruler of all!

B. The Occupation of Your Mind, *Set your mind on the things above*

1. The Command, *set your mind*

The language suggests that we are to "constantly fix our thoughts" (Harris) on the things above. If *keep seeking* focuses on the practical pursuit of eternal things, then *set your mind* focuses on the inner attitude maintained during the pursuit. As Lightfoot said, "You must not only *seek* heaven; you must also *think* heaven." We should not underestimate the importance of the mind in the Christian life, cf. Rom 12:2, Eph 4:23, Phil 2:5, Rom 8:6, and 1 Peter 1:13.

2. The Object

a. What it is not, *not on the things that are on earth*

Paul makes explicit the contrast with *things above* through the words *the things that are on earth*. He is not attempting to make an absolute division between above and below that means everything down here is wicked—the rest of the chapter will detail negatively *and positively* how we are to live down here. He is simply warning and reminding us that we are not to be "at home" here. This is not our life's goal, therefore we should not be consumed and preoccupied with it, cf. Phil 3:17-21; 1 Peter 1:17; 2:11; 4:1-3.

b. What it is, *on the things above*

Our mental occupation must be with the glories of Christ that have been and will be revealed. It may sound like pious talk, but it is talk of what produces true piety. Focus on the things above is what motivates toward holiness (1 John 3:3), empowers our service for Christ (2 Cor 5:9-10), enables us to endure hardship and suffering (Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17-18), frees us to deny ourselves the sinful pleasures and unnecessary diversions that this world offers (Titus 2:11-13).

Conclusion: The core of spiritual growth is found in the resurrection life which we share with Jesus Christ. The governing principle that flows out of it is the call to orient our lives toward and occupy our minds with that resurrection life. Where do you stand?

1. Have you allowed the flesh and the devil to convince you that you are still alive to sin and that Christ's death and resurrection have not supplied enough power for victory?
2. Is your life oriented toward this world? Are you seeking its pleasures and possessions? Have you believed its promises of joy and satisfaction? Do you live 24/6 for the world or 24/7 for Christ?
3. Is your mind being flooded with the things of this earth? Does God have space in your mind by which He can transform you?

The Decisive Factor in Our Fellowship

Colossians 3:15

Introduction:

1. I once served on the pastoral staff of a church that had previously been full of turmoil—even to the point where a deacon punched the former pastor at a church business meeting! The police had to be called in order to bring peace. What a terrible testimony!
2. The purity and unity of the congregation was high on the Apostle Paul's discipleship agenda because: (a) sin constantly threatened both; (b) the credibility of their witness for Christ demanded both; (c) the genuineness of each depends on the presence of both; and, most importantly, (d) Christ died to achieve both.
3. The middle of Colossians 3 provides wonderful help for the unity of God's people. Verses 12-14 emphasize the character of Christ, with v. 14 establishing love as the overarching priority—it cause the congregation to grow together and toward Christ.
4. But how do we maintain close relationships when problems arise? People who love each other can still face problems that could grow into conflicts. Verse 15 provides us with the help we need because it answers the question, what should control the congregation

I. What does "rule" mean? To be the decisive factor.

II. What should rule? "the peace of Christ"

A. Reconciliation of all things, Col 1:20.

B. Reconciled to God, Eph 2:13-14a

C. Reconciled to God's people, cf. Eph 2:14 ff

III. Where does it rule? "in your hearts" (cf. 3:16 "singing...in your hearts")

IV. Why should the peace of Christ rule?

A. We were called to the peace of Christ, "to which indeed you were called"

B. We live as parts of a body, "in one body" (cf. 1:24; 2:19).

V. How does the peace of Christ rule?

A. We submit ourselves to it, "Let..."

1. We must, therefore, meditate on it.

2. We must choose to model our lives on it.

B. We cultivate and express thanks, "and be thankful" (cf. 1:12; 2:7; 3:16, 17; 4:2; Phil 4:6-7).

Focus: The peace that Christ has achieved should be the controlling factor in how we relate to one another as members of His body. Christ's peace should be the decisive factor for the fellowship of His body.

Applying this:

1. We put God's glory and the testimony of the gospel ahead of ourselves, cf. 1 Cor 6:1-8. First option: submit to wise judgments (vv. 2-5); Second option: suffer wrong/defrauding (v. 7).
2. We put edification ahead of our enjoyment, cf. Rom 14:19.
3. We reject retaliation and revenge, cf. Rom 12:17-19; 1 Peter 3:10-12.
4. We replace jealousy and selfish ambition with gentle wisdom, cf. James 3:18.

Live Redemptively!

Colossians 4:5-6

Introduction:

1. The church of Jesus Christ seems to have repeatedly fallen prey to one of two extremes—to get so close to the world that it becomes like it or to retreat so far from the world that it loses contact with it. Neither imitation nor isolation is acceptable. The Lord said we are to be “in the world” but not “of the world,” so we must find the biblical balance.
2. The early church was no different—it too faced a world that was no friend to grace! Yet, it is within this world that Christ calls us to represent Him with life and lip. Before closing this letter, the Apostle Paul wants to make sure that these believers understand and embrace their responsibility to be Christ’s ambassadors in Colossae.
3. What does it take to represent Christ well? Colossians 3:5-6 focus our attention on two keys: how we live and how we speak.

I. Redemptive Conduct, v. 5

A. Its Character, “Conduct yourselves with wisdom”

The Greek word translated “conduct” is walk and is the common way for speaking of our manner or pattern of life. The dominant message of the NT epistles is that those who know Christ should have radically distinctive lives from those who don’t know Him:

- Col 2:6 “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him”
- Eph 4:1 “I...implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called”
- Eph 4:17 “this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk”; cf. 2:1-2 “you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked”
- Romans 4:4 “we too might walk in newness of life”

The pattern of life that Paul urges here is one governed “with wisdom.” It seems that the concept of wisdom was an important one in terms of Paul’s desire to keep the Colossian believers from being seduced by false teachers, cf. 2:8, 23. In contrast to this false wisdom is the true wisdom that is found in Jesus Christ “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3). It is this wisdom that should fill the preaching, teaching, and worship of God’s people, cf. 1:28; 3:16. In other words, the assembly of God’s people should be characterized by Christ-centered wisdom communicated through the ministry of the Word in preaching, teaching, and song.

But the particular point in v. 5 ties most directly back to Paul’s opening prayer for these Colossian believers, 1:9-10. Paul’s godly desire for them was to know God’s will “in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that [they would] walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects.” So the focus of wisdom in v. 5, like that of 1:9-10, is not some type of abstract, philosophical wisdom; it is practical, life-related wisdom. He is calling on them to live skillfully in light of who they are in Christ and what God wants them to be and do. Specifically, as we will see, Paul is concerned that they live wisely in light of their responsibility to bear testimony to the saving work of Jesus Christ.

B. Its Context, “toward outsiders”

The particular context for such wise living is in relation to those who are outside of the church, i.e., non-believers. Although it may seem somewhat out of place with our “seeker friendly” ministry world, Paul clearly distinguished between those who are in Christ and those who aren’t. This isn’t the only place where he does this:

- 1 Cor 5:12-13 “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”
- 1 Thes 4:12 “so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need”
- 1 Tim 3:7 “And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*”

These texts all mark off the church as distinct from the world—believers are insiders while non-believers are outsiders. This is an important truth to remember in our day. The church growth movement, by adopting sociological principles, has tried to soften this distinction so that lost people feel no sense of disconnectedness, no sense of being an outsider. And it is quite obvious that the accommodation in this is always from the insider toward the outsider, i.e., we try to eliminate our differences from him, not vice versa. The result of this is a church that looks more like those whom the Bible calls outsiders. The consequences of this are being felt all across professing Christianity. We cannot truly honor and obey God if we allow this difference to be blurred or obliterated.

Yet, we must remember that the point of this text presupposes contact with those who are outsiders, so it cannot be interpreted to mean that we should be isolationist. Paul is teaching us how we ought to live in relation toward those who don’t know Christ. We must walk wisely. It seems to me that this is a big truth in the NT. Living in the world without being like the world requires much discernment and discipline. We must know what we can and cannot do, and we must deny or engage ourselves as appropriate for those who know Christ and want to make Him known, cf. 1 Cor 10. The fact that this is a complex task has led, as I see it, folks to often construct rules that make it easier to stay unstained by the world but often make it harder to have contact with the world. They move past separation toward isolation.

C. Its Concern, “making the most of the opportunity”

The specific concern that Paul addresses about walking wisely is stated in the words, “making the most of the opportunity.” There is some debate about what the exact sense of this phrase is, but most translators have taken it as reflecting the language of the marketplace, i.e., buy up the time. Rather than being a statement about specific opportunities, it is a more general statement that probably takes into consideration that fact that the day of witness and ministry is short, time is limited. Since it is, we should be opportunistic. There should be a sense of urgency about our lives so that recognizes the importance of our conduct before lost people. Our lives should be lived in light of eternity, so they must recognize the eternal consequences of the lost condition. Our conduct is an important part of our witness for Jesus Christ, cf. Titus 2:1,5,8,10; 1 Peter 2:12; 3:1; Phil 2:15.

Where should we be looking for opportunities? (1) Daily needs of life, John 4:7 ff.; (2) Disease, Mark 5:25-34; (3) Death, Ecclesiastes 7:2; (4) Guilt, Acts 7:54-60, 26:14; (5) Discussion of current events, Luke 13:1-5; (6) Religious celebrations, John 7:37-38; (7) False worship practices, Acts 17:22 ff.; (8) National and world events, Acts 17:26-27; (9) Blessings and prosperity, Acts 14:16-17; (10) Failure and hopelessness, Acts 16:27.

Transition: Properly representing Christ in our conduct is absolutely essential, but we must also join words to our walk!

II. Redemptive Communication, v. 6

Paul asked them to pray for his “speech” (4:3-4), now he exhorts them about their own.

A. Its Consistency, “Let your speech always be”

The first thing we should notice is that this is a continual obligation of the believer—it should always be this way. There is no room for compartmentalizing our words in to those which are acceptable for witnessing and those which are fine for other occasions. The believer is a witness for Christ 24/7, so his speech must *always* be redemptive, even when the content is not specifically filled with the gospel. How we speak when we aren’t communicating the gospel may have significant affects on how we speak when we do communicate gospel truths.

B. Its Character, “with grace, *as though* seasoned with salt”

Paul uses two phrases to describe the character of the speech he wants the Colossians to practice:

1. Gracious, “with grace”

There are three possible meanings of this phrase: (1) gracious; (2) thankful; or (3) full of God’s grace. It is used in 3:16 as thankfulness, but that doesn’t seem to fit this context well since this is communication toward people, not God. It would seem dangerous to rule the third out completely given our utter dependence on God to speak effectively in redemptive contexts, but that general theological principle is probably presupposed and not the precise intent here. The real point seems to be the manner of speaking, i.e., that it should be gracious in character, cf. 2 Tim 2:24-25.

This is notoriously difficult to apply and always involves an element of subjectivity—one person’s graciousness is another person’s compromise and a third person’s harshness. There is no doubt that attempts at graciousness can in fact betray the truth. But it is also true that some people mistake rudeness for boldness. Each of us will have to make our own decisions about where the line is, but we must honor the principle. For me, I try to focus on the concepts and ideas rather than people, e.g., attack Catholic teaching without always saying Catholic.

2. Attractive, “seasoned with salt”

The point here seems to be that our speech should have flavor and not be tasteless or bland. Perhaps winsome is too much, but Paul seems to be saying that we ought to be concerned about effective communication, the kind that gains and holds a hearing. This is a counter-point to the problem he avoids in 1 Cor 2:1-5 where rhetoric distorts the message in order to gain ears. Again, the point is that there is a balanced position between the options. We should try to communicate in ways that are first accurate, then interesting.

C. Its Concern, “so that you will know how...”

Picking up on the fact that he is speaking about how to relate to unbelievers, Paul ties this exhortation about their speech to how they respond to those who question them about their lives and faith. A radical life will lead to questions about it and the assembly of believers, so we must be prepared to answer them properly.

The truth here, again, presupposes a certain amount of interaction between believers and lost people—how else would questions and answers be given? And it calls on us not to be so locked into a programmatic and formulaic witness that we cannot communicate the gospel to individuals in terms of the current conversation. Learn to talk with non-believers in broader ways than the Romans Road!

Conclusion:

Jesus left us in the world so that we can bear testimony to His saving grace and power. We should not get locked into holy huddles that isolate us from those who are outside. The Lord didn't. The Apostle Paul didn't. Neither should we.

We should orient our lives in such a way that they reflect our awareness of lost people and the importance of relating to them wisely and opportunistically. We should work hard to have speech that is effective in communicating God's truth because it is gracious and appropriate to the hearers.

As ambassadors we represent our Lord in a world that does not recognize His Lordship. God's will is that we live and speak so that the good news about Christ is advanced in this world.

God's Love for the World
John 3:16

- What's the most famous verse in the Bible? I would guess that it is John 3:16—at least the reference is famous because of being held up on signs at sporting events.
- When I was a youth pastor, I had an activity where the teens had to find all kinds of things, and one of them was someone who could quote John 3:16. If I remember correctly, no one found someone who could do it.
- It's a famous verse, but I am afraid that it isn't actually known very well. It deserves to be both well known and well understood, so let's take some time to consider *five important truths about God's love* from this famous verse.

I. The Nature of God's Love, "so loved...that He gave"

There are different kinds of love. One kind of love emphasizes feelings or passion, sometimes even in immoral ways. Another kind of love is more of a family or friendly nature, mainly an affectionate kind of love. The kind of love spoken of in this text is something different from these. Its stress is not on God's emotional state as much as it focuses on the sacrificial character of this love and the fact that this love moves to meet needs. Let's be clear, I am not suggesting that God's love is without affection or compassion, but that the emphasis of this text is not how God *feels* about the world, but what God *does* for the world.

In fact, there is biblical warrant for concluding that genuine love must be manifested in ways that aim to meet the need of its object. 1 John 3:16 says "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us" and 1 John 4:10 says "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

This is important because there is a tendency to treat God's love for mankind as sentimental or based in emotion. The outcome of this tendency is to emphasize mankind's importance to God to such an extent that it ignores or distorts God's commitment to His own holiness and justice. But the whole point of this text stands against that—*gave* here is a one word summary of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, cf. vv. 14-15; 1 John 4:9-10. God *gave* His Son as a sacrifice for sins precisely because sin must be dealt with, it can't be just wished away. God's love does not ignore the consequences of sin; it addresses them through the death of Jesus Christ.

II. The Object of God's Love, "the world"

- A. Its Badness, cf. vv. 19-20; 14:30; 17:14.
- B. Its Bigness, cf. 1 Jn 2:2

III. The Cost/Extent of God's Love, "He gave His only begotten Son"

These words indicate the great cost of God's love in display—His unique Son, Jesus Christ. The significance of this sacrifice is the love between the Father and the Son, cf. 5:20. For the Father to send the Son to endure the penalty for mankind's sin is an act of extraordinary love.

IV. The Purpose of God's Love, "that...shall not perish, but have eternal life"

- A. Viewed Negatively, "shall not perish"

That is, receive the just condemnation for sins. Though not stated directly, by setting it next to *eternal* life the clear implication is that perishing is also eternal in nature.

- B. Viewed Positively, "have eternal life"

God promises eternal life to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus said, in 10:10, that He came so that His followers could have life and have it more abundantly. He also said that eternal life is knowing God and Him (17:3).

V. The Limits of God's Love, "whoever believes in Him"

Although we don't like to think about it, this text also reveals to us the limits of God's love—it is ultimately only for those who believe in Jesus Christ. God mercifully extends to the world the opportunity to accept the gift of His saving love through repentance and faith, but there will come a point where God's love will be withdrawn and the consequences of sin and unbelief will be paid.

The good news of the gospel is that God loved the world and sent His Son to die so that we might not face the consequences of our sin, but instead have the privilege of fellowship with and true worship of our Creator. The reason that this is good news is because there is bad news—we are sinners and sin always brings a penalty, death.

Conclusion:

- Here's what this famous Bible verse teaches: *God's love provided eternal life through the death of Jesus Christ for all who believe in Him.*
- Genuine faith accepts what God says about us (condemned sinners) and about who and what Jesus Christ did (lived righteously, died sacrificially, rose victoriously), therefore the heart believes and the mouth confesses Christ as Lord.

Don't Waste Your Life on This World!

1 John 2:15-17

Introduction:

1. On the streets of New York City, like in most major cities, you will find vendors who are selling replicas, really counterfeits, of very expensive items for a very cheap price. A friend of mine bought a very expensive "Rolex" watch for only a few dollars. It didn't work very well or last very long, but it had the Rolex name on it!
 2. Sadly, counterfeits are not limited to watches—there is counterfeit Christianity too. Multitudes claim to be Christians, but that claim doesn't match reality. This may be the devil's most effective strategy for hindering the gospel. By watering it down and weakening the church, he deceives many into thinking they are truly Christians when, in fact, they are not. It didn't take long for the devil to adopt this tactic—the pages of the NT were not finished before he had sowed tares among the wheat.
 3. The Apostle John, therefore, has to write to a group of believers to instruct them on how one may know for certain that he is genuinely a Christian. Near the end of his first epistle, he explained his purpose for writing it: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (5:13). Because of statements like this in this letter, many conclude that John provides us with tests of spiritual life so that the difference between false profession and genuine possession may be seen clearly. One way of viewing these tests is that there are three categories: love, righteousness, and faith. It is a very important and fruitful study, but today I'd like to focus on a text that deals with one part of the test of love.
 4. This familiar passage establishes a clear contrast between two kinds of love, and that contrast marks out the difference between those who are truly born again and those who only claim to be. John tells us what we cannot do then provides reasons for why we cannot do it. In reality, he is asking and answering the question, what does genuine Christian love for God look like?
- I. The Restriction, 2:15a
- A. The Object *the world, nor the things in the world*

1. *The World*

The word *world* is used to refer to: (1) the universe, i.e., the sum total of creation (John 17:24 "before the foundation of the world"); (2) the earth, i.e., the inhabited world (1 John 3:17; 4:9; Rom 1:8); (3) the people who dwell on the earth (1 John 2:2); and, (4) the evil world order controlled by Satan and in opposition to God (1 John 2:15; 5:4). Regarding this last aspect, Hiebert writes that world is used for "The human race in its alienation from and opposition to God. John here has in view the world of humanity steeped in sin and dominated by the evil one" (*The Epistles of John*, p. 100).

a. The World and Satan

It is under his dominion. He is the prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:14) and the whole world is under the control of the evil one (5:19). Because Satan is "driven out" and "stands condemned" it follows that the world itself is doomed.

b. The World and Unbelievers

Unbelievers live according to the course or ways of this world, being under its control (Eph 2:1-3). The cares of this world have a deadly effect on the spiritual condition of people (Matt 13:22; cf. 18:7).

c. The World and God

Though sinful, and ruled by Satan, the world is nevertheless the object of God's love and saving activity (Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:9,14).

d. The World and the Christian

Believers have been chosen out of the world (Jn 17:6) in such a way that we no longer belong to it. We are still in this world (4:17; Jn 17:11,15), yet we are distinct from it, so that we and the world are set in opposition to each other (3:13; cf. Gal 6:14). The significant aspect of the world's hatred for believers is that it listens to false teachers (4:6). The believer cannot hate the world, but neither can he be conformed to (Rom 12:2) or contaminated by it (2 Pet 1:4).

2. *The things that are in the world*

Perhaps a deliberate generalization that seeks to draw our attention to particulars, i.e. to move us from abstract to concrete. This is not a condemnation of material things *per se*, but the allurements of this evil system.

B. The Action, *love not*

The present imperative with the strong negation can be translated, "Stop loving the world." *Love* here probably shifts from its normal connotation in the letter (to be concerned for the benefit of the object loved). The thought is of the pleasure which the person hopes to get from the object of his love. To love, in this sense, is to be attracted by something and to want to enjoy it; the idea relates to appetite and desire (cf. Jn 3:19 *men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil*; Jn 12:43 *they loved the approval of men more than the approval of God*; 2 Tim 4:10 *Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*).

How do we reconcile the fact that we are commanded not to do something which God does, namely love the world? Possibilities: (1) world has a slightly different meaning, i.e. Jn 3:16 refers to people, 2:15 refers to an evil system; (2) love has a different meaning, i.e., Jn 3:16 is God's beneficial and selfless love, 2:15 is our exploitative and selfish love; (3) God, due to His perfect holiness, is capable of doing something which we, due to our sinful depravity, are not able to do.

This commands implies that (1) the love involved must come under the authority of the will, i.e., we cannot cop out by pleading uncontrollable attachment; (2) love itself is not self-directing, i.e. it does not certify the rightness of the object loved—contra the Romantic spirit of the age, i.e., the primacy of feeling/emotion.

II. The Reasons, 2:15b-17

A. Because loving the world and loving the Father are incompatible and mutually exclusive, 2:15b

Present tense (one *loving* the world) indicates someone who characteristically places supreme value on the world, i.e., it is the object of his devotion and attention. This type of person is devoid of love for the Father.

How can such exclusive statements be made? Because you can't love what hates Christ! (cf. John 5:18). Because salvation is a total reorientation of the person's heart. Cf. Jesus teaching on two masters (Matt 6:24) or James statement re: friendship with the world (Jas 4:4). But we must remember that we are all a mixture—why else would we be commanded to *stop* loving the world!

B. Because the things of this world are corrupt, 2:16 ("not from the Father...from the world")

To further support his argument of a hard line between world-lovers and Father-lovers, John sets forth the famous threefold description of the things of this world. Contrary to our normal discussions regarding worldliness, John does not name specific activities but addresses matters of the inner person or spirit. Why does he do it this way? (1) Potential avoidance of Gnostic heresies which associated sin with material things; (2) it retains the universal application by not being time-bound and specific; and, most importantly, (3) the point of discussion is how love for the world is antithetical to love for the Father and addressing the essential spirit of worldliness cuts right to the core of that issue: a heart dominated by lust and pride is not a regenerated heart!

1. *The Lust of the Flesh* (the desire of our sinful, fallen nature)

Lust is desire or craving, it is desire as impulse carrying the sense of urgency; *flesh* refers to our fallen humanity, life disconnected from God and His authority. The ultimate thrust of the combination appears to speak of *sensuality*, i.e., living according to the satisfaction of our senses or appetites.

2. *The Lust of the Eyes*

“Temptations which assault us not from within, but from without through our eyes,” cf. Achan, Samson, David. Pattern: see, crave, and commit; look, lust, and leap.

3. *The Pride of Life*, cf. 3:17

An “unholy desire for things one has not, and unholy pride in things one has.” “Portrays an attitude of boastfulness and a hollow self-exaltation based on material possessions of social prominence,” cf. Luke 12:15-21; 1 Tim 6:17.

C. Because the world is passing away, but doing God's will is eternal, 2:17

Conclusion:

1. Here's the focus of this text: *God's children will not set their devotion upon this sinful and passing world, but seek to do the will of the Father.*
2. For those who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, this text provides both assurance and exhortation:
 - a. Assurance because you have experienced God's work in your heart that makes you feel out of place in this world—it's no longer your home and you have experienced the battle the Spirit fights to break you freed from its pull on you.
 - b. Exhortation because you know that in spite of the world's sinful and passing nature, you're still susceptible to temptation and need to guard your heart by focusing it on God's glory and grace, remembering that what your Father has for you is better than anything this decaying and decadent world offers.
3. For some who may be here, this text confronts your lost condition by exposing a heart that really does love the world, not the Father. Salvation does not come by your work, so this text isn't a call to reform your life. This text is intended to show you what God accomplishes in the heart when He gives the new birth. Listen to the language of this text again—“the love of the Father is not in him.” If your heart is full of love for the world, it is because you do not have the love of the Father in you. So, what do you need to do? Recognize God's glory in the gospel and call on Him to rescue your soul!