

Preaching the Gospel

A monthly magazine for preachers and those who want to preach.

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EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Sermons can be divided into three types: 1) **Topical sermons**—with or without a text. 2) **Textual sermons**—when the outline comes from the text of one or a few verses. 3) **Expository sermons**—based on a longer selection of scripture.

Expository sermons, if they are going to be good sermons, are the most difficult of the three and require intensive study and careful craftsmanship.

The problem is that the sermon can easily become a verse-by-verse commentary. Such is more appropriate to a Bible class, though even in a Bible class the teacher should do more than comment on each verse. The teacher should have a goal and should try to bring out the main point(s) of the passages.

An expository sermon is an attempt to make clear (expose) the meaning of the selection. But the preacher does this by arranging his material the same way he would in a topical or textual sermon. He must begin by having a clear purpose statement, and he must shape his sermon to bring the hearers to that goal.

A Good Expository Sermon Requires:

1. **Careful, intensive study.** You must read the text; you must study commentaries; you must discuss with others. You must do this until the author's meaning is very clear to you and you have a message (a goal) for your sermon. You should try to solve any problems in the passage, but it should not be your goal to explain all the problems.
2. When you have studied until you have a good understanding, **you must form your purpose statement.** As closely as possible, your purpose should be to bring out the main point of the passage and apply it to your hearers.
3. **Then you must decide on how to arrange your material.** Your main points should be taken from the verses you have chosen, but the points do not have to be in the order in which those matters appear in the verses. You may want to combine the material scattered in several verses for one point. You may want to rearrange your points so that they are not in the same order in which they appear in the text. Just make sure that your arrangement will accomplish your purpose.

For good examples of expository sermons read the following:

1. **J. W. McGarvey's Sermons** (Gospel Light Publishing Company) are sermons which are completely written out and have given me more help than any other volume of sermons. About half of his sermons are expository. They are: Cases of Conversion: *The*

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Eunuch, Cornelius, Lydia, Paul. Cases of Non-Conversion: Felix, Agrippa. Divine Providence: Joseph, Esther. And my very most favorite sermon—Believing a Lie.

All of his expository sermons are based on stories, and these are the easiest of expository sermons to preach. Get this book and read it!

2. **Matthew Henry's Commentary** is almost wholly expository. He takes a passage of 10 verses or so and then comments, and his comments are outlined. If you want assistance on working up a sermon on a passage, please look at what Matthew Henry has written. Just remember that Henry was a denominationalist.
3. In **The Pulpit Commentary** after the comments on each chapter there is a section which is called "Homiletics." In that section there are many sermon outlines, and many of them are on either the whole chapter or a large portion of it and are, therefore, expository sermons. Again, the authors are denominationalists.
4. Ken Craig gave me the series of **sermons on Romans preached by Robert Harkrider**. Ask him to send you the cassettes (kwcraig@charter.net). They are great expository sermons.

The Advantages of Expository Preaching

1. It teaches the audience what scripture really means.
2. It causes the preacher to study deeply and carefully.
3. It causes the preacher to analyze the material and to organize carefully.
4. It makes the hearer understand that what is taught in the sermon is exactly what the Bible says.

The Problems of Expository Preaching

1. It can become a rather dull verse-by-verse commentary.
2. If the material is not well-mastered, the result can be little more than reading and repeating the verses.
3. An expository series can become repetitious. I noticed that when Mark Roberts gave us an example of how he plans his sermon subjects, he planned to preach one sermon from the Psalms each month. This is an excellent plan because by separating the sermons those sermons will not seem repetitious.

Preacher, tackle expository preaching. You have to work to make your sermon lively and vital. You have to use illustrations and applications, just like in a topical sermon. And finally, the reason you preach must be because you are excited about what is taught in the passage and believe wholeheartedly that the message is needed by the hearers.

You may find that preaching expository sermons gives you great satisfaction.

HOLDING FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE

Bill Hall, Athens, Alabama, U.S.A.

Hello, Simon, did you hear about the incident up at the temple yesterday? We were a little late for the hour of prayer, and when we got there, we heard this awful commotion in Solomon's porch. Peter and John had just healed a lame man—they're always trying to get attention, you know—and Peter was doing the preaching as usual.

Well, Simon, you should have heard the sermon. No, on second thought, I'm glad you were spared the agony. Do you know that Peter preached the same old sermon that he used on Pentecost? People get tired of hearing the same old thing. And he was so offensive. He actually accused them of being ignorant and said they had been guilty in the crucifixion of Jesus. They were guilty, of course, but Peter doesn't have to be so plainspoken right to their face. And scripture, scripture, scripture! I get so tired of hearing scripture all the time. I thought he would never get through. And, would you believe, it was the very time I had chosen to take Joseph with me. I was just mortified! I apologized for what happened, but I just know he'll never go with me again. In fact, he might never speak to me again.

But that's not all! Before Peter got through preaching, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came up and arrested Peter and John right there. Simon, I was so embarrassed! We'll never do any good with all this bad publicity. They get a good crowd together and then ruin it all by getting arrested. The apostles don't know a thing about gaining public favor.

And all they want is money. They are probably wanting more people to sell their possessions. They won't get mine! I can't stand fanatics; besides, those people are just showing off giving all that money. And, by the way, Simon, I hear they are counting the number of converts again. Boy, they sure do go for numbers. But let them count. The way they're going, there won't be a church left around her. We can just get ready to close the doors. Nobody wants to be a part of a church where the preachers preach the same old thing all the time and are constantly being arrested.

Did you say something, Simon? What did you say? The number is what? The number of men is up to ... to ... 5,000?

--From *Two Men*, pp. 140-141.

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HOME BIBLE CLASSES

In order for a person to be converted to Christ, he must hear and believe the gospel. This is why we must teach all nations (Matthew 28:18). Faith comes from hearing (Romans 10:17)

In the years when gospel meetings lasted a minimum of two weeks, and sometimes six weeks or longer, many people were converted. People came every night and listened carefully. They heard all the things they needed to become Christians, and they believed and were baptized.

In about 1955 I preached a 15-day gospel meeting and helped in a Vacation Bible School for the church in Wallowa, Oregon. The VBS attracted young people from other areas, and there was intensive teaching in the sermons, in the classes and individually. If I remember correctly we had 30 responses, and more than half were baptisms. (And I was exhausted at the end!)

It has been many years since I have heard of a church having a 15-day gospel meeting. There are many reasons for this, some of them not so good! So because we do not have connected preaching every night over an extended period, and because people (apparently) will not attend such an effort, people are not hearing the gospel under the circumstances which people heard a couple of generations ago. The result is that few are being baptized during gospel meetings.

How do we teach people the gospel, then? One answer is: Teach them in classes in their homes. I get the bulletin of the Ellettsville, Indiana church where Johnie Edwards, his son and his grandson are preaching. That bulletin is full of reports of baptisms, and in nearly every case it is mentioned that the people baptized were taught in home Bible classes.

I have taught such classes ever since I started preaching. This is a wonderful way to teach the gospel.

I have used several different “systems”. They all work if they result in preaching the true gospel. My advice: Listen to men who are successful in personal work and use the methods they use if you are comfortable with them. I have used cloth charts, film strips (which I don’t use very well), and just the Bible on the kitchen table. In teaching a Hindu man I taught two years of weekly studies in which we went through the Book of Luke as well as other things. (He was subsequently baptized and is now preaching the gospel.) I am teaching three home classes at present in which we are going through the book of Acts. I have used a variety of ways of presenting the gospel. An easy series to teach is the six-lesson Know Your Bible Correspondence Course written by Gene Tope (available from Truth Book Store). Bro. Ken Craig has an awesome series he calls *The Scheme of Redemption* (kwcraig@charter.net).

The truth is—if you are teaching the gospel, any method you are comfortable with works. But investigate different methods until you are excited about something. Then use it for all you are worth. Preach the gospel!

“You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house.” --Acts 20:18-20.